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ALFRED TENNYSON

EDITED BY JAMES E. THOMAS



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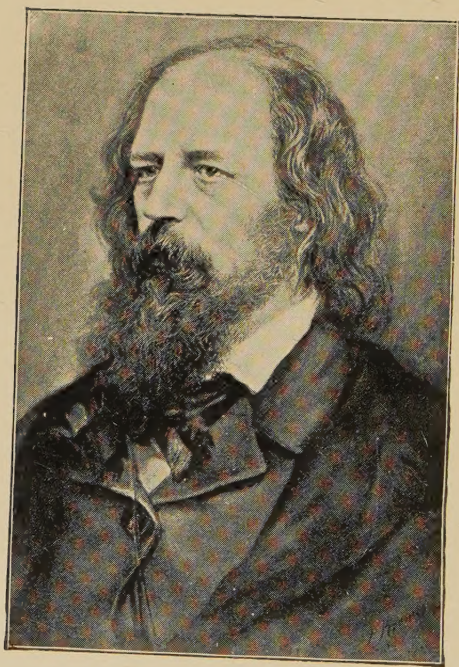
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ALFRED TENNYSON.

The Silver Series of English and American Classics

TENNYSON'S
LANCELOT AND ELAINE
AND
THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

EDITED, WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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PREFACE.

IN adding another to the many text-books of English poetry already published, the editor ventures to hope that the present volume may fulfil a useful purpose in bringing the student of literature into closer touch with the greatest artist-poet of the present century, and to a better understanding of the only great English epic since the days of Milton. The "Idylls of the King" have not been a favorite subject of study in secondary schools. This is unfortunate, and is due, perhaps, to a mistaken impression concerning the adaptability of the poems for school use. If the present volume shall serve in any way to efface such an impression, its primary mission will be accomplished.

Are the "Idylls of the King" beyond the comprehension of pupils of secondary schools? If we attempt to follow in detail the spiritual significance of the poems, the question must be answered affirmatively. But to enjoy the beauty of the lines it is not necessary for us to seek out their allegorical meaning; this may well be left for subsequent consideration. Apart from their spiritual significance, the poems present sufficient material for pleasant and profitable study. The form and substance of these tales of wonder and woe, of chivalry and amatory devotion, their rich pictorial fancies, musical cadences, and delightful melodies,

will always afford abundant charm to the student. It matters not what may be the spiritual significance of "Lancelot and Elaine." The pathetic story of Elaine, the knightly courtesy of Lancelot, and the passionate love of Guinevere will always touch a tender chord in our hearts. Other features will commend themselves to the student, — the brilliancy of style, the rapidity of movement, the swift changes of scene, the striking contrasts, — all contributing to the "poetry of action" which should lead to the study of the sentimental and reflective in Tennyson. These all appeal to a more general study of this epic in our schools.

In studying the poetry of Tennyson certain books should be available to the pupils for reference, and a list of these is given in part in this volume. The editor desires to call attention, also, to the accompanying life of the poet, the History of the Arthurian Romances, and the Introduction to the "Idylls," all of which he believes will conduce to a better understanding of "Lancelot and Elaine" and "The Passing of Arthur." Malory's "Morte Darthur" will be found useful, to show how closely the poet has followed the original narrative. Lest the book should not be at hand in all schools, the editor has made frequent quotations from Malory's work, in the notes. The glossary at the end of the book, containing the archaic and obsolete terms used by Tennyson, together with their meanings, will be found valuable to the pupil. The editor hopes that the present volume may stimulate the student to a more extended study of Tennyson and his poetry.

J. E. T.

INTRODUCTION.



BIOGRAPHICAL.

Birth of Tennyson. — Halfway between Horncastle and Spilsby in Lincolnshire, a land of quiet villages, large fields, and gray hillsides, on the lower slope of one of those wolds so common to that part of England, nestles the hamlet of Somersby. Here, August 6, 1809, was born, in the Somersby Rectory, Alfred Tennyson, the fourth of twelve children. His father, Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, held this living in connection with that of Great Grimsby. His mother was Elizabeth Fytche, daughter of Rev. Stephen Fytche, Vicar of Louth. The country around was not at all such as one associates with the fens. It was not flat or prosaic, with dreary waters and low-lying fens, but was diversified by hills and valleys, and full of the sights and sounds of country life, rich in flowery hollows and patches of meadow land; a fit birthplace for a great poet.

Early Life. — When seven years of age the boy was asked, "Will you go to sea or to school?" "To school," he replied. Accordingly he was sent to the Louth Grammar School, near which his maternal grandmother lived. "How I did hate that school!" said Tennyson, many years later. The terms that he spent there seem to have brought very

little with them to be remembered afterwards. He left Louth in 1820, and came home to study with his father. Of his earliest attempts at poetry he says: "According to the best of my recollection, when I was eight years old I covered two sides of a slate for my brother Charles with Thomsonian blank verse in praise of flowers, Thomson being the only poet I knew. Before I could read I was in the habit on a stormy day of spreading my arms to the winds, and crying out, 'I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind;' and the words, 'far, far away,' had always a strange charm for me. About ten or eleven, Pope's Homer's 'Iliad' became a favorite of mine, and I wrote hundreds and hundreds of lines in the Popeian meter, nay, even could improvise them. At the age of twelve I wrote an epic of six thousand lines, *à la* Walter Scott. Though the performance was very likely worth nothing, I never felt myself more truly inspired."

Life at Home. — After leaving Louth, Alfred, together with his brother Charles, studied under his father. Dr. Tennyson was a man of great ability, scholarly and sensible. All that the boys learned of languages, of the fine arts, of mathematics, and of natural science, until they went to Cambridge, was learned from him. Although their studies were undoubtedly somewhat desultory, Alfred received a good classical education and became an accurate scholar. The boys had the advantage of their father's excellent library. There they read Shakespeare, Milton, Burke, Goldsmith, Addison, Swift, Defoe, and Bunyan.

First Book of Poems. — Charles and Alfred were never supplied with a surplus of pocket money. Now and then

they were sorely in need of sufficient funds to make some excursion. It was to obtain money for such a purpose that in March, 1827, they made a collection of verses which they had written from time to time, and submitted it to Mr. Jackson, a bookseller of Louth, who offered them £20 for the copyright, on condition that they would take half of the amount in books. The offer was accepted, and thus Alfred Tennyson began his career as a poet.

Comment on the Poems.—As an outburst of youthful poetic enthusiasm the book is not wanting in interest, although it is full of boyish imitations of other poets. Tennyson himself could hardly tolerate it in later years. The poems had comparatively little in them to indicate future promise, and attracted slight notice. Perhaps the most successful poem of the volume is “Antony and Cleopatra.” The *Literary Chronicle* of May, 1827, says of the book, “This little volume exhibits a pleasing union of kindred tastes, and contains several little pieces of considerable merit.”

Cambridge Life.—In 1828 Alfred Tennyson matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge. He is spoken of as “six feet high, broad-chested, strong-limbed, his face Shakespearian, with deep eyelids, his forehead ample, crowned with dark, wavy hair, his head finely poised. What struck one most about him was the union of strength with refinement.” Thompson said at once on seeing him, “That man must be a poet.” He was of nervous temperament, and of shy and solitary habits, which gave him an appearance of affectation that soon wore off on more intimate acquaintance.

His solitude was early broken through, and he fell in with a

set of choice literary spirits, among whom were Arthur Hallam, who was to exert such an influence on Tennyson's life, James Spedding, Richard Monckton Milnes (afterwards Lord Houghton), Henry Alford (afterwards Dean of Canterbury), Richard C. Trench (afterwards Archbishop of Dublin), and many others who were destined to be prominent in later life. They were all members of the same society. They were a genial, high-spirited, poetical set, full of speculation and enthusiasm for the great literature of the past, and for the modern schools of thought. It is reported that Tennyson, because of his shyness, never read a paper before the society. He is represented as having Johnsonian common sense, a rare power of expression, and as being very genial, full of enjoyment, full of sensitiveness, and sometimes feeling the melancholy of life. He passed through "moods of misery unutterable," but eventually threw them off. Despite such periods of gloom, he worked on at his poems. He read his classics, his history, and natural science. He also took a lively interest in politics.

Poetic Work at Cambridge. — In 1829 he won the Chancellor's prize at Trinity College, Cambridge, for his poem on "Timbuctoo." This was written at the instigation of his father, who wished him to compete for the prize. The poem, which was in blank verse, made considerable stir. The Athenæum declared it "would have done honor to any man who ever wrote." It was a unique poem. It was not machine-made. Tennyson threw aside conventionality. There is some forced art and labored decoration in it, but it is a well-sustained piece of work, imaginative, æsthetic, polished, and indicative of his later powers.

Meanwhile the friendship between Tennyson and Hallam was growing into greater intimacy. At one time they purposed publishing a volume of poems together, but finally gave up the project. Tennyson, however, continued to write, and to a few chosen friends in his own room he would often read his latest verses.

Publication of Poems of 1830. — In 1830 Tennyson published his volume entitled, "Poems, Chiefly Lyrical," containing a carefully culled collection of his poetry up to this time. Sixty of the number are found in the present issue of his poems, among which we may note, "Claribel," "Lilian," "Isabel," "Mariana," "To Madeline," "The Merman," "The Mermaid," "The Deserted House," and "The Poet." The volume was well received. The *Westminster Review*, although it doubted the immediate appreciation of the poems, yet acknowledged that they showed the possession of poetic powers, and predicted a brilliant future for the writer. Arthur Hallam wrote an enthusiastic article on these poems, declaring that the features of original genius were clearly and strongly marked.

Departure from Cambridge. — Owing to the illness of his father, Tennyson left Cambridge in 1831, without taking a degree, and returned to Somersby. Shortly afterwards the father died, leaving the mother and a sister to the care of Alfred. He continued to live at Somersby until 1837, making occasional trips in the meantime to London and other towns. Arthur Hallam was a frequent visitor at Somersby. The acquaintance formed at Cambridge had ripened into an almost inseparable friendship between the two.

The 1832 Edition. — Meanwhile, Tennyson was busy pre-

paring a new volume of poems, which was published in 1832. Some of these poems are among his best known, as, "The Lady of Shalott," "The Miller's Daughter," "Enone," "The Palace of Art," "The May Queen," "The Lotus Eaters," and "The Dream of Fair Women." The volume in every way marked a distinct advance in his poetical ability. It is interesting to note that thus early the Arthurian legends had attracted Tennyson's attention. "The Lady of Shalott" marks the first inclination of the poet in that direction. In these poems Tennyson showed himself both as an artist and as a thinker. In them are variety of subject, of treatment, and of melody; a sense of beauty, a keen insight into nature and man. The volume, however, encountered some severe criticism which wounded the author to the quick, and he became so nervously sensitive to these adverse comments, that he withdrew from the press "The Lover's Tale," which he had composed.

A Period of Silence. — A long period of silence followed the appearance of the second volume, prompted somewhat by the hostile criticism the poet had received, but more directly owing to the great loss he sustained in the death of his intimate friend, Arthur Hallam, who died in 1833. The death of Hallam was a severe blow to Tennyson. He was too much overwhelmed to work; even poetry failed to charm him. It was not until years afterwards that his grief found voice in one of the noblest elegies in the language, "In Memoriam," a poem worthy to be classed with "Lycidas" or "Adonais."

From 1833 to 1842. — For nearly ten years no volume of Tennyson appeared from the press, though he occasion-

ally contributed a poem to some periodical. But though silent, he was not idle. He spent much of his time in London or with his mother, read Milton, Wordsworth, and Keats, and visited the Lakes. These were the years of seed-time and growth, which were to bring his poetic ability into full maturity. Piqued by criticism, he withdrew more to himself that he might carefully judge and prune his own work. It was during this time that he formed an attachment for the lady whom he afterwards married.

The 1842 Volumes.—Thus Tennyson continued for a number of years, now toiling over a manuscript, now in social concourse with his literary friends, and now running down into the country to enjoy an outing with some kindred spirit. At last in 1842 his fears and hesitations were dispelled, and the long silence was broken. Two volumes of "Poems, by Alfred Tennyson" appeared, and a new era in the poet's reputation began. The two volumes of poems were substantially what we have to-day. Among the *new* poems were "The Gardener's Daughter," "Dora," "Locksley Hall," "Godiva," "Edward Gray," "Lady Clare," "Break, Break, Break," "St. Simeon Stylites," "The Beggar Maid," "Sir Galahad," "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere," and the "Morte d'Arthur." Lord Hallam Tennyson, in his "Memoir," says of the poet at this time: "My father's comprehension of human life had grown, and the new poems dealt with an extraordinarily wide range of subjects,—chivalry, duty, reverence, self-control, human passion, the love of country, science, philosophy, and the many complex moods of the religious nature." The recep-

tion of these poems was immediately enthusiastic. Critics of all kinds lifted their voices in praise. Foremost among those to appreciate Tennyson was Wordsworth, the Poet Laureate, who remarked, "He [Tennyson] is decidedly the best of our living poets, and I hope will live to give the world still better things." In America the poems met with a cordial reception. Lowell declared that "it might be centuries before such a thinker and speaker as Tennyson appeared." The rise of Alfred Tennyson may be said to date from the appearance of these poems.

Personal Appearance. — Of Tennyson's appearance at this time Aubrey de Vere writes: "It was in 1841 or 1842 that I first met the poet. The large, dark eyes, generally dreamy but with an occasional gleam of imaginative alertness, the dusky, almost Spanish, complexion, the high-built head, and the massive abundance of curling hair like the finest and blackest silk, are still before me, and no less the stalwart form, strong 'with the certain step of man.'" Carlyle presents this picture of his "soul's Brother": "A great shock of rough, dusky-dark hair; bright, laughing, hazel eyes; massive aquiline face, yet most majestic; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian looking; clothes cynically loose, free, and easy. His voice is musically metallic; speech and speculation free and plenteous. I do not meet in these late decades such company over a pipe."

The Influence of Tennyson. — The unique position of Tennyson as an influence in drawing together the poetry of the earlier and the later years of the century is not, perhaps, sufficiently recognized. No other poet has so

singularly combined the attributes of the old and the new. Without borrowing from his predecessors, he softened and broadened their manner into a tone which prepared poetry for its later development.

1842-1847. — The beginnings of fame came to Tennyson very quietly. His poems continued to be widely read, and succeeding editions were published. All this time he was busy on "In Memoriam," now in London, now at Beachy Head, and now at Cheltenham. In 1845 a pension of £200 was bestowed on him in recognition of his poetic talents.

"The Princess." — Meanwhile the poet's friends were clamoring for a complete work. They complained that his power had been displayed in fragments having no connection. In obedience to this demand, he published in 1847, "The Princess, a Medley." It has generally been considered that the germ of "The Princess" is to be found in Dr. Johnson's "Rasselas." Tennyson himself said that he believed the subject of the poem to be original, and certainly the story is full of original incident, humor, and fancy. Tennyson went over the plan of the poem with the lady who was to be his wife as early as 1839. He is reported to have said that the two great social questions of the day in England were "the housing and education of the poor man, and the higher education of woman," and he affirmed that the sooner woman found out, before the great educational movement began, that "woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse," the better it would be for the progress of the world. This is the keynote of "The Princess," the appearance of which excited considerable unfavorable com-

ment. Although admittedly brilliant, it was thought by many, even among Tennyson's friends, to be scarcely worthy of the author. The abundant grace, descriptive beauty, and human sentiment were evident, but the medley was thought to be somewhat incongruous, and the main web of the tale too weak to sustain the plot and the embroidery raised upon it.

"In Memoriam." — The year 1850 was a notable one for Tennyson. It was in this year that he gave to the world "In Memoriam," on which he had been at work for years, and in which he poured forth his very soul. "In Memoriam" is, perhaps, the richest tribute ever offered by the affection of friendship at the tomb of the departed. This tribute to Arthur Henry Hallam, his friend and companion of seventeen years before, was received with reverence and admiration. No poem of Tennyson is so often used for quotation, none so rich in phrases that have long since become household words. But it will probably be always read and remembered for special passages rather than for the strength of its argument. It is, in the opinion of many, the greatest work of the poet's genius. "He has done for Friendship what Petrarch did for Love." It is a permanent addition to the wealth of English literature. Everywhere is the expression of a deep religious feeling and an abiding faith.

Tennyson's Marriage. — Tennyson was married June 13, 1850, to Emily Sellwood, for whom he had formed an attachment in 1835; but whom he had been unable to marry because of his financial condition. Mrs. Tennyson is the "dear, near, and true" in the beautiful dedication

of "Enoch Arden." They were married at Shiplake Church, near Caversham, and settled at Twickenham, whence in 1853 they removed to Farringford in the Isle of Wight. Their wedded life was ever a happy one. Mrs. Tennyson, possessing rare mental qualities, became her husband's adviser in all his literary efforts, and to her he invariably referred his work for a final criticism before it was published.

The Laureateship. — It was also in 1850 that Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate. Wordsworth was dead, and the literary world began to discuss the succession to the laureateship. There were several candidates in the field, among them Leigh Hunt and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The final choice, however, fell on Tennyson, and he retained the position until his death.

"Maud and Other Poems." — It is impossible to give even a passing notice to many of the poems that flowed from his pen after his appointment to the laureateship. "The Charge of the Light Brigade" was published in 1854. In 1855 appeared "Maud and Other Poems." Some of the most exquisite lines of "Maud" had been written long before, but when the poem appeared it was received with a general chorus of disapprobation. It was declared to be dreamy, obscure, and incoherent. Its chief fault was thought to be the war spirit that it breathed, which was not suited to Tennyson's muse. The poem was not wanting in vindicators, however, and received much praise from some of the commentators. It was a poem that Tennyson delighted to read aloud. He regarded it as one of his best works, an opinion that posterity has sustained.

"The Idylls," "Enoch Arden," etc. — In 1855, Tennyson

matured the plan of "The Idylls of the King." The first four of the Idylls appeared in 1859, and were followed at intervals by the others until 1885 (see "The Idylls of the King" in the Introduction). They may be said to represent the finest expression of Tennyson's genius. In them he reaches the height of his poetic fame. While waiting for the proper mood, as he expressed it, to complete them, he busied himself on subjects less lofty in strain, — the sea, which he always loved, and the different phases of English life, in which he took a deep interest. From the chivalric heroes of the past his mind reacted to the heroism of the present, and in 1864 he published a volume which he called at first "The Idylls of the Hearth," a title withdrawn before the publication of the work. Included in the work were "Enoch Arden," "Aylmer's Field," "The Northern Farmer," and other poems that dealt with nearly every phase of human life. "Enoch Arden" touched a chord of popular sympathy. Sixty thousand copies of the poem were sold in a very short time, and with the exception of "In Memoriam" it became the most popular of Tennyson's works.

The Dramas. — From 1864 to 1875 an occasional poem appeared from Tennyson's pen, but nothing of importance. The year 1875 marks an epoch in Tennyson's literary career. In this year he published the first of his dramas. It may seem surprising that a poet of sixty-six years should essay a new field of literature. It was a hazardous experiment, and one to which Tennyson's talents seemed hardly adapted; but he had always taken a lively interest in the stage; he believed in its future; he regarded the drama as one of the most humanizing of influences; and he was anxious to

round out his poetic career by making some permanent contributions to the literature of the Stage. He chose for his first subjects the three great periods in English history of "Harold," "Becket," and "Queen Mary," so as to complete the line of Shakespeare's English chronicle plays. He called his subjects his "historical trilogy." "Queen Mary" was published in 1875, "Harold" in 1876, and "Becket" in 1884. With respect to character-painting, Tennyson considered "Queen Mary" the most successful of his plays. It was, however, severely criticised when put upon the stage. While the workmanship was superb, it was deficient in dramatic construction; it lacked motive and progress. In "Harold," Tennyson remedied these defects in a measure, although the same general criticisms have been made on all his dramas. "Becket" is a dramatic poem rather than a stage play, a study of character rather than an effort of movement and action. It has been the most successful of any of Tennyson's dramas. Of the minor dramas, "The Falcon" and "The Cup" were published in 1884, though they had been represented on the stage in 1881; "The Promise of May" was published in 1886. The last of his dramatic works, as well as the last great literary effort of his life, was the beautiful pastoral play, "The Foresters," which was produced in 1892, only a short time previous to the poet's death.

Other Noteworthy Poems. — During the last years of his life Tennyson busied himself not alone with his dramas. With extraordinary vigor and freshness he continued to produce other work of the highest literary excellence. He wrote "The Revenge, a Ballad of the Fleet" in 1878, "The Defence of Lucknow" in 1879, two of the most spirited of

his poems, and worthy to be classed with "The Charge of the Light Brigade." In 1880 he published a book of "Ballads," containing among others the two just mentioned. This was followed by a volume of poems in 1885, dedicated to the poet Browning. Among these poems was "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade." In 1886 appeared "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," and in 1889 "Demeter and Other Poems." They were the aftermath of the poetic harvest, but they bore no evidences of mental decay.

Elevation to the Peerage. — Meanwhile Tennyson had been approached with the offer of a peerage. For some time he hesitated to accept the honor, but at last he consented, with the remark that he should regret his simple name all his life. Accordingly, in 1884, he was made Baron of Aldworth and Farringford, and took his seat in the House of Lords.

Death of Tennyson. — During the last years of his life Tennyson became wedded to country solitude. He liked to wander through the byways around Aldworth and Farringford, but seldom visited the city. In the fall of 1892 his strength failed rapidly, and he passed away October 6, at Aldworth. He died in the fulness of years and honor, with the capacity of his genius unwithered by age, rich and enchanting to the last. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, near the grave of Browning.

TENNYSON AND HIS POETRY: A STUDY.

Tennyson the Man. — No one can read the poetry of Tennyson without feeling that, at the basis of all his

teaching, indeed, of all his works, is Tennyson *the man*. Like Milton, he combined great poetic genius with exalted character. To the union of these two elements we may attribute the charm which he has exercised over the hearts and minds of the English-speaking people. As early as 1832 Arthur Hallam wrote of Tennyson: "His nervous temperament and habits of solitude give an appearance of affectation which is no true interpretation of the man. I think you would hardly fail to see much for love as well as for admiration." The same may be said of his later life. He was reserved even to shyness, and seldom went into society. He was highly sensitive to criticism. At times he was possessed with a spirit of melancholy, and while composing he was often abstracted for days. These conditions sometimes made him appear brusque; but this seeming discourtesy was only superficial. With his family and friends he was happy and genial. He possessed a strong sense of humor, delighted in witty stories, and told them admirably. He was a brilliant conversationalist, and one of the most entertaining of companions. He was versed in a wide range of subjects, and there was a strong vein of common sense in all his talk. He had a high regard and sympathy for his fellow-men, and a noble and splendid courtesy. He was a true English gentleman.

Higher Qualities of his Character.—No element of Tennyson's character so pervades his work as his nobility of thought. This lofty tone is present in every poem he has written. His verse is characterized by the very spirit of honor and of reverence for all that is pure and true.

His religious faith, too, was of the loftiest. He had a profound respect for sincere religion in every shape, and all Christian creeds had his sympathy. The immanence of God in man; the brotherhood of the human race; the continuance of each man's personal consciousness in the life to be; the vitality of the present; God and the spiritual, the only true and real,—these were the tenets of his faith. His conception of love was noble and reverential. Love was to him an unselfish passion; such love he ever manifested in his home and among his friends; such love he regarded as the inspiration of man's noblest deeds. He had a childlike simplicity of nature, and this characteristic marks his work. While he often adorns his lines to profuseness for the purposes of art, the emotions he appeals to are easy to understand and common to all. The principles that he upholds are those upon which society is based. He had little inclination for politics, but was deeply interested in the social questions of the day. "I believe in progress," he said, "and I would conserve the hopes of man." This is the keynote of his poetry. He was intensely patriotic, and regarded England as the greatest country on earth. The patriotic lyrics he has written stir the blood. He was for Freedom, such as had been evolved by the gradual growth of English institutions. He had small faith in outbursts of revolutionary fervor. Liberty he considered to be gained by patient years of working, and not by radical changes.

And, lastly, as characterizing the man through his works, we may note an abiding faith in Law throughout the worlds of sense and spirit, a recognition of a settled scheme of

great purposes underlying a universal order, and gradually developing to completion.

Tennyson the Poet. — In every well-developed literature we find two classes of poets, one including those who draw their material directly from Nature; the other, those who interpret Nature through Art. The former, such as Wordsworth, take their characters from real life; their incidents have their counterparts in human experience; they seldom indulge in description for the sake of description; their language, as a rule, is plain, simple, and impassioned; they do not trouble themselves with niceties of expression; they are great artists because they commune with the truth instead of working on critical principles; they are true to Art because they are true to Nature. The latter, of which Gray is an example, are essentially imitative and reflective. They are usually men possessed of great natural ability, extensive culture, refined taste, and a wide acquaintance with the literature that has preceded them. Occasionally they are endowed with great original genius. Their material is derived not so much from the world of Nature as from the world of Art. To this class we must assign Tennyson. Not, perhaps, a poet of great original genius, but of great assimilative skill, taste, and learning, he belongs to a class of poets whose work has a twofold value and interest, first, for its obvious, simple, and intrinsic beauties, which make its popular side, and, second, for its niceties of adaptation and expression, which form its intellectual side. In Tennyson we deal with an accomplished artist whose most successful works are not direct studies from simple

Nature, but studies from Nature interpreted by Art. Not the equal of Shakespeare, Milton, or Wordsworth, he is, nevertheless, a great poet. For fifty years he stood at the head of contemporary English poets, and his work is the most rounded and melodious, the most adequate expression of the poetry of Victorian England. Of broad scholarship and great intellectual ability, he absorbed the deepest and best thought of his age. Singularly alive to the spirit of his time, he has responded to its moods, and made its burning issues the very soul, the animating principle, of his work.

The Poetry of Tennyson. — Turning now to the substance of Tennyson's poems, we may note that above all they display the work of a consummate artist. As an artist in verse, Tennyson is the greatest of modern poets. Other poets may have surpassed him in special instances; but he is the one who most rarely nods, and who always finishes his verse to the extreme. "An artist should get his workmanship as good as he can, and make his work as perfect as possible," was his guiding principle. As an artist he cannot be excelled, but his art, like that of all poets who strive for artistic effect, is sometimes ornate rather than pure, and characterized by a want of simplicity. We have referred to Tennyson's simplicity of nature, to the simplicity of the emotions and feelings to which he appeals, but we cannot always point to the simplicity of his language. Directness of expression often gives way to elaborated diction. If the matter be meagre, the form is elaborate; yet there is always perfection of detail. The metre is as near perfection as any poet has ever attained.

We feel that Tennyson knows all the secrets of harmonious measures and is a master of rhythm. The melody of his diction is always charming, his epithets are always suggestive. Analogous to art, indeed, a part of it, is beauty, for art is but the love of beauty and the power of fitly expressing it. Tennyson was faithful to beauty. Power to see beauty and power to shape it were possessed by him in a remarkable degree. Of mere sound-beauty his poems are full.

Combined with his love of beauty is the love of Nature which his poems breathe. Everywhere it enters into his poetry; but to Tennyson Nature was Law, not Life. His descriptions of Nature are delightful. For minute observation and vivid painting of the details of natural scenery Tennyson is without a rival; but there is a lack of warmth, of life, in his Nature. He looks at Nature as a picture and describes it from the outside. His description excites more our intellectual than our emotional interest. His Nature is Law, not a living Being.

The last element in Tennyson's poetry which we shall note is the sympathy for his fellow-men which the poet has expressed. It embraces every class of mankind, high and low, thinker and worker. It takes upon itself the emotions, the hopes, the fears, the highest aspirations of mankind. Taken all in all, the voice of his age has found its surest utterance in the poetry of Alfred Tennyson.

HISTORY OF THE ARTHURIAN ROMANCES.

Popularity of the Romances. — To the student of English literature there is no more fascinating field of research

than the cycle of romances that centre about King Arthur and his Round Table. The theme of bard, chronicler, and trouvère, these tales were the delight of court and cottage for centuries, and satisfied the intense passion of the times for narrative or romance literature. The most popular poets of every age have turned to this fountainhead of European romance to find in the body of legend here locked up a volume of ideal subjects worthy of their song. Spenser, in his "*Faerie Queene*," makes "*Prince Arthure*" his type of "magnificence" and "noble doing." Milton and Dryden thought the "*Round Table*" a not unworthy theme for an epic. Lapsing into obscurity during the trying times of the Reformation and the prosaic era of the Commonwealth, these tales of chivalry have been rescued at last, and the nineteenth century has witnessed a revival of national interest in them, for which we are indebted chiefly to Southey and Tennyson, the latter of whom has clothed these grand romances with all the beauty of his most polished art.

Origin of the Romances. — It is fortunate for the student that the development of the Arthurian romances can be traced with comparative ease. In recent years the subject has been investigated in all its phases by the ablest scholars and most profound critics of Europe. In its dawn the Arthurian romances carry us back into the dim twilight of British literature, when Kelt and Saxon were waging a deadly struggle for supremacy, when the heroic valor of the Kymri inspired the bards attached to this or that chieftain to sing the praises of their patron in camp and castle. Some of these songs have come down to us, and, although

they are obscured and distorted by fables, we may still glean occasional bits of genuine history. From these old Welsh songs we may conclude that Arthur was a real, historic personage, that he lived in the sixth century, and that, as chief of a petty tribe in Cornwall, he headed the tribes of western Britain against the encroaching Saxons from the east, and the Picts and Scots from the north; about him the later bards wove many strange myths and fictions. We may note here, also, that at this time many of the oppressed Kymri fled to the Continent as an asylum, and settled in Brittany, carrying with them the songs, traditions, and tales of their former home. They carried with them, too, the remembrance of their chieftains, particularly of Arthur. There they sang of his deeds, his death, and his hoped-for return. Some of these old songs are still extant, and we are not surprised to find Brittany filled with Arthurian traditions. Thus from two sources, the Kymric and the Breton, do we obtain our bardic knowledge of Arthur. In all these songs he is simply a courageous warrior, who by his heroic bravery stamped his image on the unwritten records of his country, and dying left behind him a memory dear to the national heart. How is it, then, that "the name of King Arthur came to stand for an ideal of royal wisdom, chivalric virtue, and knightly prowess, which was recognized alike in England, France, and Germany"? Let us see.

From the Sixth to the Twelfth Centuries. — From the sixth to the twelfth centuries there was a dearth of literature throughout Europe, particularly in the modern European tongues. Bards and minstrels continued to sing, to tell

the mythic history of the past, enveloping their characters in a haze of fancy and fable to suit the caprice of their hearers. In their hands Arthur becomes the son of Uther Pendragon. He is a king, the chief of battles. Nothing can resist his valor. He holds his court at Caerleon. He undertakes great expeditions, subdues great tracts of country, and finally falls in the battle of Camlan. We find, however, no trace of knight-errantry or of the high ideas of love and honor, or of that chivalry which breathes through the later romances, and lends such a charm to them. For these we must look to another source.

The Breton Bards and Geoffrey's History. — It seems highly probable that the Arthur of *romance* is to a great extent the creation of the Breton bards. In their songs he becomes a poetic character, based on historic tradition. From being simply the warrior hero of song, he becomes an epic hero. Straggling tales, oral traditions, and unwritten songs were collected and remodelled to suit the fancies of later bards. In sympathy with the age of knight-errantry and chivalry which was dawning, the more advanced notions of chivalric heroism and Christian virtue were introduced and attributed to Arthur and his courtiers. This collection was thrown into a fictional whole, called "Brut-y-Brenhined," or "History of the Kings." In the first part of the twelfth century this manuscript came into the hands of Geoffrey of Monmouth, a priest of the Anglican Church, who made a Latin translation of the work, incorporating therein his own fund of Welsh legends and traditions of the day. Here we find the Arthur of the Breton bards, who retains but little of the warrior chieftain

of the old Welsh stories. His thoughts, his words, his deeds are those of a knightly king. He is in the flush of vigorous youth, perfect in form, handsome in features, and noble in character. He is a Christian, with high ideas of the Christian virtues. He is the centre of the world of chivalry, surrounded by courteous knights. He succors the oppressed and redresses wrongs. He is as brave as the Charlemagne of story. His reputation is world-wide. He is led by love of glory and adventure beyond the limits of his own kingdom. He chooses a queen, Guinevere, daughter of Leodegrance, the superior of all the ladies of the world, and carries her likeness with him into combat as a sure token of victory. In the "History of Geoffrey," then, the germ of history blossoms forth into the Arthur of romance, "an ideal of the purest chivalry, and surrounded by all the pomp and circumstance of knight-errantry."

Other Histories of the Romances. — The "History of Geoffrey," with its weird Kymric legends, its scraps of authentic history, and its fully developed romance, all mingled together under the guise of history, was received with delight by nobility and commoners. It gained immediate popularity, and produced a sensation beyond all parallel. At this time all Europe was seized with an intense passion for narrative or romantic literature, and nowhere was this passion stronger than in Britain. The "History" supplied the need. People of all ranks read it with avidity. But its popularity did not stop here. The Norman trouvères, or minstrels, found in the book a veritable storehouse of romantic stories, which, versified, and embellished with their own fancies, never failed to

fascinate their hearers. Robert Wace translated the "History" into Norman-French verse, adding here and there a popular tradition. He it is who first makes mention of the Round Table, which he dismisses with a mere allusion. Fifty years later, Layamon, a Welsh priest, wrote a "History" in English, recapitulating the main points of Geoffrey's "History" with some important additions. Here we find the first mention of the fairies at Arthur's birth, and of his voyage, when dying, to the Isle of Avalon. Here, too, the legend of the Round Table undergoes development.

A Summary. — Such was the development of the Arthurian romances up to the beginning of the thirteenth century. It is worthy of note that they consisted of little more than a condensation of preëxisting poems, legends, and tales. As we come to the beginning of the thirteenth century, however, a marvellous transformation takes place, and the fully developed modern romances of Arthur begin to assume definite shape.

The Work of Walter Map. — It is to the genius of one man that we are indebted for the greater part of all that is artistic and imperishable in the Arthurian romance. In the early part of the thirteenth century, Walter Map, a chaplain to Henry II., and, later, Archdeacon of Oxford, a man of undoubted genius and vast learning, and of high repute at court, impressed with the popularity of the Arthurian tales, conceived the idea of spiritualizing them by blending with them the legend of the Holy Graal, and thus making them a medium of instruction in the recognized theology of the day. The Holy Graal, or Grail,

was a cup used by Christ at the Last Supper, and subsequently by Joseph of Arimathea to receive the blood that flowed from the wounds of Christ as he was hanging on the cross. There was a tradition that Joseph came to England, bringing with him the sacred vessel. Here it was lost. The search for it, the Quest of the Holy Graal, was undertaken by many of the Knights of the Round Table. Such was the legend that Map skilfully blended with the Arthurian tales, and so successfully did he accomplish his object that his works obtained an instantaneous popularity, not only in England but in all Europe. The *trouvères*, or romancers, reproduced the chaste fantasies of Map, and invented additional romances, based on existing legends. It is here that the Arthur of romance bursts into view, surrounded by a brilliant pageant of knightly heroes and heroines. But before all is the introduction of a grand unifying theme, which serves as a central idea to bind the detached legends, tales, and poems into a grand cyclus of Romance, conforming in some respects to an epic. This theme is the Quest of the Holy Graal. It is the one point towards which every incident tends. Its achievement is the culminating point of the whole story. By it Map has spiritualized the tales, and changed essentially their whole scope and aim. In his hands the Legend of the Holy Graal becomes an allegory of man's striving after a perfect knowledge of Truth and of God, to be gained only by a life of ideal purity. Into the popular adventures of the knights he has incorporated a series of sermons on the Quest for Eternal Life. It is a reflection of the highest spiritual

aspirations of man, and of his mortal conflict with the powers of evil.

The Romances Developed.—In the romances, Arthur's Court, held at Caerleon-on-Usk, or perhaps at Camelot, becomes the centre of all that is imperial in empire and knightly in knighthood. Valiant knights from other lands, allured by the splendor of his court, are drawn as by magic to his side. Here we find Lancelot du Lac, Tristram, Galahad, Percival, and Bors. The Order of the Round Table is instituted. The Round Table had thirty-two seats, including the "*siege perillous*," which was wrought by magic art, and reserved for the best knight in the whole world, until whose appearance it was to remain vacant, but which was filled at last by Galahad. At this point, Arthur retires somewhat into the background. As he took no part in the Quest of the Holy Graal, the narrative is more especially occupied with the deeds of those who acquired celebrity by participating in that noble quest.

Malory's Work.—Finally we come to the true source of the Tennysonian Idylls, Malory's "*Morte Darthur*." In 1470, Sir Thomas Malory made a compilation of the preëxisting tales and legends which he found in "many noble volumes," for the making of his "book of King Arthur, and of his noble knights of the Round Table." This book was published by Caxton, in 1485, and was entitled "*Morte Darthur*." For the Arthurian legends, Malory's work is the most accessible to the modern reader. It is not an artistic production. It contains no well-conceived plot, and there is an evident lack of

system in it. It makes no pretence to chronological truth. The setting of the stories belongs to Malory's own time rather than to the times he tells of, to the age of chivalry rather than to the crude era of Arthur. No such state of society as depicted by Malory ever existed. His picture is only a fantastic and exaggerated idealization of the feudal chivalry of the Middle Ages. Still, the book has a magnetic charm that is irresistible. It early made a deep impression on Tennyson, and to it he had recourse for much of the material of the Idylls.

THE IDYLLS OF THE KING.

Ever since the first appearance of the Idylls, in 1859, there has been no end of controversy as to Tennyson's real purpose in the production of this work. Happily many of the existing doubts have been dispelled, and the poet's own idea is made clear in the "Memoir" recently issued by his son. From this treatise we learn that the Arthurian romances made a deep impression on Tennyson at an early age. When a boy he chanced upon a copy of Malory's work, and became fascinated with its stories of chivalry and knightly prowess. From his earliest years he had written out in prose various histories of Arthur. In 1832 the first of his Arthurian poems appeared in the form of a lyric, "The Lady of Shalott," another version of the story of "Lancelot and Elaine." This was followed ten years later by the other lyrics, "Lancelot and Guinevere" (partly, if not wholly, written in 1830) and "Sir Galahad." In the 1842 edition also

appeared "Morte d'Arthur," which was represented to be the fragment of a long epic, the rest of which the author had destroyed. Thus it appeared that the poet was already meditating a freer treatment of the Arthurian romances than he had given them. Later, Tennyson himself said to his son, "At twenty-four I meant to write an epic or a drama of King Arthur, and I thought that I should take twenty years about the work." A fragment of an epic in prose, and a rough draft, written in 1833, were found among Tennyson's MSS. His son tells us that after 1840 Tennyson began to study the epic King Arthur in earnest. He thought, read, and talked about King Arthur. What he called "the greatest of all poetical subjects" perpetually haunted him, and in 1855 he determined upon the final shape of the poem.

The seemingly random and desultory manner in which the Idylls were brought out mystified scholars and critics. The first issue, comprising only four Idylls, — "Enid," "Vivien," "Elaine," and "Guinevere," — appeared in 1859. They bore little evidence of any epic design. They were regarded as four character studies of womanhood, two forming lights in the general picture, and the other two being the contrasted shadows. Vivien, crafty and wicked, was set over against the tender innocence of Elaine. Enid, the true wife, was opposed to Guinevere, the untrue. They were what their names implied, *Idylls*, picturesque poems, not pastoral, of a lofty and noble strain, each presenting a separate picture with one leading sentiment for its motive. The remaining Idylls appeared at intervals between 1869 and 1885, as follows, — in 1869,

"The Holy Grail," "The Coming of Arthur," "Pellias and Ettarre," and "The Passing of Arthur"; in 1871, "The Last Tournament"; in 1872, "Gareth and Lynette"; in 1885, "Balin and Balan." Subsequently "Enid" was divided into "The Marriage of Geraint" and "Geraint and Enid," making twelve poems in all, conforming to the number hinted at in the "Morte d'Arthur" of 1842. To these Tennyson prefixed a prologue, dedicating the Idylls to Prince Albert, and added an epilogue "To the Queen."

With the appearance of the 1869 Idylls, the real intention of the whole work seemed to be changed. It was apparent that the Idylls were not simply pictorial fancies involving character studies, but that each filled its place in a connected series grouped round a central figure; that the "Idylls of the King" formed one great poem, characterized by epic unity of design and grandeur of tone. Moreover, a spiritual significance was seen to be deeply interfused through these great poems, and Tennyson himself, in his epilogue "To the Queen," disclosed his grand moral purpose, which is now recognized as consistently running through the whole series. He there describes the work as an old imperfect tale:—

"New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still: or him
Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one
Touched by the adulterous finger of a time
That hover'd between war and wantonness,
And crownings and dethronements."

This allegorical significance is rarely obtruded by the poet, and, indeed, apart from such significance, the lover of poetry will always find a charm both in the form and substance of these tales of love, chivalry, and celestial vision. It is for the story and the style that the *Idylls* should be read by the pupils of secondary schools. The allegory, the moral, may be left for more mature study and consideration. Beneath the surface the poem is an allegory of the soul of man warring with sense, of the spiritual struggling against the sensual element in our nature, of the passing of the soul through life to death and through death to resurrection. "The intellect, the conscience, the will, the imagination, and the divine spirit in man are shadowed forth in mystic personages." And this spiritual significance, as well as the epic unity of design, we now know to have been determined upon by the poet as early as 1855.

Too much importance has been attached to the allegorical element in the *Idylls*. Arthur and his knights and the ladies of his court are not abstractions of ideal qualities; they are real men and women, with human feelings and trials and conflicts; they do represent and embody certain virtues and vices, but these qualities work and live in their actions and in their lives. Of two reviews of the *Idylls*, which Tennyson himself considered the best, he often said: "They [the authors] have taken my hobby and ridden it too hard, and have explained some things too allegorically, although there is an allegorical, or perhaps rather a parabolic, drift in the poem. . . . Yet there is no single fact or incident in the

Idylls, however seemingly mystical, which cannot be explained as without any mystery or allegory whatever." Again, when asked as to the interpretation of a passage in the Idylls, he answered: "They mean that, and they do not. I hate to be tied down to say, '*This means that,*' because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation." "Poetry," he affirmed, "is like shot-silk, with many glancing colors. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability and according to his sympathy with the poet." Of the general drift of the Idylls, he said: "The whole is the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the table-land of life and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or of one generation, but of a whole cycle of generations." According to the author himself, the three lines (912-915) at the close of Arthur's speech in "The Holy Grail" are the (spiritually) central lines of the Idylls:—

"In moments when he feels he cannot die,
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the High God a vision."

The unity of design of the Idylls appears not only in the gradual development of the effect of one great sin, but also in incidental features. Thus, the story in its course runs through one complete year, the changes of nature in their succession forming a background for the successive scenes of the poem. Concerning this phase of unity Tennyson made the following manuscript note:

“‘The Coming of Arthur’ is on the night of the New Year; when he is wedded ‘the world is white with May;’ on a summer night the vision of the Holy Grail appears; and the ‘Last Tournament’ is in the ‘yellowing autumn-tide.’ Guinevere flees through the mists of autumn, and Arthur’s death takes place at midnight in midwinter. The form of ‘The Coming of Arthur’ and of the ‘Passing’ is purposely more archaic than that of the other Idylls.”

With the exception of the two Geraint poems, which were taken from Lady Charlotte Guest’s translation of Welsh legends, called “The Mabinogion,” “The Idylls of the King” follow more or less closely the outlines of Malory. Tennyson omits the preposterous and the more indelicate elements of the romance. His knights and ladies are refined, graceful, noble, and without roughness. Just as Shakespeare never troubled himself to invent the plots of his plays, but had recourse to old stories and ballads, modifying them in detail, and making them to all intents and purposes new dramas, so Tennyson has taken the mediæval books of romance, and constructed from them a poem having a unity of design, imbued with a moral significance, and suited to the aspirations of our own day, while preserving to some extent the archaic color of the feudal world. The reign of Arthur as depicted by him is a sort of Utopia, unreal and visionary. Arthur is a man in whom the spiritual instincts of his nature dominate the sensual. He is, as Guinevere acknowledges, “the highest and most human, too.” He is the ideal man, and his many struggles to uphold the best in

life are but a reflection of the eternal conflict waged in human life between the spirit and the flesh.

Of the merits of the different Idylls there is a diversity of opinion. Elsdale considers "Guinevere" and "The Passing of Arthur" to be the two finest. Following these he would place "Merlin and Vivien" or "Lancelot and Elaine." The latter, Gurteen considers one of the finest, if not the finest, of the whole series of Tennyson's Arthurian poems. It seems the most idyllic of the Idylls. Tennyson's power of drawing the character of a simple and lovable woman is here seen in perfection. The soliloquy of Lancelot at the close is one of the finest passages of the Idylls. Lord Hallam Tennyson in his "Memoir" says, "Of all the 'Idylls of the King,' 'The Holy Grail' seems to me to express most my father's highest self." There is, perhaps, no book of the Idylls so perfect in its scheme, so brilliant and impressive in its imagery, as "The Holy Grail." The remaining Idylls, although containing many admirable passages and depicting many lovable characters, possess no claim to individual superiority. They are links in the chain of development, tracing the growth of the "one sin" to its ultimate fruition. The Idylls as a whole are the most permanent of Tennyson's contributions to English literature. They embody the highest poetic achievement of his genius, and belong to the exalted heights of song. On them he lavished all the beauty of his most cultivated art, and their completion marked the fulfilment of his forty years' hope.

It has been a matter of considerable discussion among commentators whether "The Idylls of the King" meet the

requirements of an epic poem. The consensus of opinion seems to be that the work is entitled to be so classed. We know that Tennyson himself considered the combined series as an epic. Departing somewhat from the conventional epic form by lack of closely continuous narrative, the Idylls yet have the grandeur of tone and the underlying unity of design essential to an epic. One central figure dominates the whole, towards whom all the action and all the personages of the story converge. The events tend towards one important issue through a succession of minor episodes. The twelve books present a full cycle of heroic story. Taken all in all, "The Idylls of the King" seem to possess a rightful claim to be considered what Tennyson intended they should be, "The Epic of Arthur."

BOOKS OF REFERENCE.

The following books, among many, are recommended as being helpful to those who desire a more intimate knowledge of Tennyson and his works:—

Poetic and Dramatic Works of Tennyson. Houghton, Mifflin & Company's Edition.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir, by his son.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Study of his Life and Works, by Arthur Waugh.

The Poetry of Tennyson, by Henry Van Dyke.

Victorian Poets, by E. C. Stedman.

Tennyson, His Art and Relation to Modern Life, by Stopford A. Brooke.

The Teaching of Tennyson, by John Oates.

Studies in the Idylls, by Henry Elsdale.

Essays on Lord Tennyson's Idylls, by Bishop Littledale.

A Study of the Works of Tennyson, by E. E. Tainsh.

The Growth of the Idylls of the King, by Richard Jones.

Illustrations of Tennyson, by J. Churton Collins.

The Arthurian Epic, by S. H. Gurteen.

INTRODUCTION TO "LANCELOT AND ELAINE."



TENNYSON has followed closely the lines of the original romance. He has reproduced the tale with exquisite beauty of thought and touch of fancy. The central figure of the Idyll is Lancelot. On either side stand the contrasted figures of Guinevere and Elaine, both of whom loved him well, but differently, — the one beautiful, of queenly dignity and splendor, but voluptuous and sin-stained, the other a simple maiden, full of sweetness and purity. Lancelot is the peerless knight, gallant and courteous as ever, but with face marred by long conflict between "the great and guilty love he bare the queen" and his loyalty to his lord. Woven in and out of the Idyll is the story of the development to which the love of Lancelot and Guinevere has now attained. In his treatment of the subject, the poet, as Elsdale remarks, trusts to the "effect of alternating light and shadow, to the artistic harmonies and contrasts produced by rapidly changing sequence and grouping of his incidents."¹ We are led rapidly on through shifting scenes, strikingly contrasted, until we come to that characteristic and culminating one between Guinevere and Lancelot in the oriel of the palace. The beautiful soliloquy of Lancelot is a fitting close of the Idyll.

¹ "Studies in the Idylls."

That the reader may more readily understand the Idyll of "Lancelot and Elaine" a brief description of the chief personages is appended.

Lancelot du Lac. Most of those prominent at King Arthur's court had, at least, a historic prototype. It is doubtful if this is true of Lancelot. Some writers are of the opinion that he is a reproduction of a certain Welsh king, Mael, a contemporary of Arthur. There are some points of resemblance between the two, but the opinion seems hardly warranted. The Lancelot of romance is undoubtedly a creation of Map. Whether Map founded his character on a preëxisting Welsh chief is a question. It is more probable that he was a fictitious character, created to embody Map's idea of a purely heroic, chivalric knight of the twelfth century. According to Map, he was the son of King Ban of Brittany, at whose death the infant Lancelot was carried away by Vivien, the Lady of the Lake, who sprang with the child into a deep lake; hence the name Lancelot du Lac. He was afterwards fostered by her, and when he grew to youth was taken to Arthur's court to receive the honor of knighthood. Subsequently by his prowess he became the most renowned knight of the Round Table, and the favorite of Arthur. He it was who acted as Arthur's ambassador to Leodegraunce, to ask the hand of the beautiful Guinevere, when commenced that fatal love which clouded his whole future life.

Guinevere, or, as the bards call her, *Gwenhwyvar*, was the daughter of Leodegraunce, or Leodegran, king of Cameliard. She became the wife of Arthur, and queen of his court. She is represented by the early bards as "of

a haughty disposition even in her youth, and still more haughty in her womanhood." She is jealous, proud, and quick to anger. Her unlawful love for Lancelot, and his attachment to her, brought dishonor to Arthur's court and destruction to the Order of the Round Table.

Elaine was the daughter of Sir Bernard, Lord of Astolat. She represents a gracious and beautiful type of innocent girlhood, and the story of her unrequited love moves all hearts.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE.



ELAINE the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot;
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray 5
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;
Then, fearing rust or soilure, fashion'd for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazon'd on the shield
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit, 10
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,
Leaving her household and good father, climb'd
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door, 15
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,
Now made a pretty history to herself
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,
And every scratch a lance had made upon it, 20
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;
That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle;
That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:
And ah, God's mercy, what a stroke was there!
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God 25
Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,
And saved him: so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
Of Lancelot, she that knew not even his name?
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt 30
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him king,
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse, 35
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:
For here two brothers, one a king, had met
And fought together; but their names were lost; 40
And each had slain his brother at a blow;
And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd:
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,
And lichen'd into color with the crags:
And he that once was king had on a crown 45
Of diamonds, one in front and four aside.
And Arthur came, and laboring up the pass,
All in a misty moonshine, unawares
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown 50
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,
And set it on his head, and in his heart
Heard murmurs, "Lo, thou likewise shalt be king." 55

Thereafter, when a king, he had the gems
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights,
Saying: "These jewels, whereupon I chanced
Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's —
For public use: henceforward let there be, 60

Once every year, a joust for one of these :
 For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn
 Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
 In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
 The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land 65
 Hereafter, which God hinder ! " Thus he spoke :
 And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still
 Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
 With purpose to present them to the Queen
 When all were won ; but, meaning all at once 70
 To snare her royal fancy with a boon
 Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last
 And largest, Arthur, holding then his court
 Hard on the river nigh the place which now 75
 Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust
 At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
 Spake — for she had been sick — to Guinevere :
 " Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move 79
 To these fair jousts ? " " Yea, lord," she said, " ye know it."
 " Then will ye miss," he answer'd, " the great deeds
 Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
 A sight ye love to look on." And the Queen
 Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
 On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King. 85
 He, thinking that he read her meaning there,
 " Stay with me, I am sick ; my love is more
 Than many diamonds," yielded ; and a heart
 Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen —
 However much he yearn'd to make complete 90
 The tale of diamonds for his destined boon —
 Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,
 " Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
 And lets me from the saddle ; " and the King

Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way. 95
No sooner gone than suddenly she began :

“To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame!
Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
Will murmur, ‘Lo the shameless ones, who take 100
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!’”
Then Lancelot, vexed at having lied in vain :
“Are ye so wise? ye were not once so wise,
My Queen, that summer when ye loved me first.
Then of the crowd ye took no more account 105
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allow’d 110
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,
Has link’d our names together in his lay,
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
The pearl of beauty; and our knights at feast
Have pledged us in this union, while the King 115
Would listen smiling. How then? is there more?
Has Arthur spoken aught? or would yourself,
Now weary of my service and devoir,
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord?”

She broke into a little scornful laugh: 120
“Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord —
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth, 125
He cares not for me: only here to-day
There gleamed a vague suspicion in his eyes:

Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him — else
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible, 130
To make them like himself; but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all:
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the color: I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond. 135
And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud — we scorn them, but they sting."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights: 140
"And with what face, after my pretext made,
Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I
Before a king who honors his own word
As if it were his God's?"

"Yea," said the Queen,
"A moral child without the craft to rule, 145
Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,
If I must find you wit: we hear it said
That men go down before your spear at a touch,
But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,
This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown: 150
Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King
Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
As all for glory: for to speak him true,
Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,
No keener hunter after glory breathes. 155
He loves it in his knights more than himself;
They prove to him his work: win and return."

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare, 160
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,
And there among the solitary downs,
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way ;
Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,
That all in loops and links among the dales 165
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.
Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,
Who let him into lodging and disarm'd. 170
And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man ;
And issuing found the Lord of Astolat
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
Moving to meet him in the castle court ;
And close behind them stept the lily maid 175
Elaine, his daughter : mother of the house
There was not. Some light jest among them rose
With laughter dying down as the great knight
Approach'd them ; then the Lord of Astolat :
“ Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name 180
Livest between the lips ? for by thy state
And presence I might guess thee chief of those,
After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.
Him have I seen : the rest, his Table Round,
Known as they are, to me they are unknown.” 185

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights :
“ Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,
What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.
But since I go to joust as one unknown
At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not ; 190
Hereafter ye shall know me — and the shield —

I pray you lend me one, if such you have,
Blank, or at least with some device not mine."

Then said the Lord of Astolat: "Here is Torre's:
Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre; 195
And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.
His ye can have." Then added plain Sir Torre,
"Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it."
Here laugh'd the father saying: "Fie, Sir Churl,
Is that an answer for a noble knight? 200
Allow him! but Lavaine, my younger here,
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
To make her twice as wilful as before." 205

"Nay, father, nay, good father, shame me not
Before this noble knight," said young Lavaine,
"For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre:
He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go:
A jest, no more! for, knight, the maiden dreamt 210
That some one put this diamond in her hand,
And that it was too slippery to be held,
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,
The castle-well, belike; and then I said
That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it — 215
But all was jest and joke among ourselves —
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.
But, father, give me leave, and if he will,
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:
Win shall I not, but do my best to win; 220
Young as I am, yet would I do my best."

"So ye will grace me," answer'd Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, "with your fellowship

O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend : 225
And you shall win this diamond, — as I hear,
It is a fair large diamond, — if ye may,
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will.”
“A fair large diamond,” added plain Sir Torre,
“Such be for queens, and not for simple maids.” 230
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd : 235
“If what is fair be but for what is fair,
And only queens are to be counted so,
Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
Not violating the bond of like to like.” 240

He spoke and ceased : the lily maid Elaine,
Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,
Lifted her eyes and read his lineaments.
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his lord, 245
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it; but in him
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose 250
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul.
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man
That ever among ladies ate in hall,
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes. 255
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,
Seam'd with an ancient sword-cut on the cheek,

And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court, 260
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
But kindly man moving among his kind :
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best 265
And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,
And ever well and readily answer'd he ;
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man, 270
Heard from the baron that, ten years before,
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.
“ He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design
Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd ;
But I, my sons, and little daughter fled 275
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods
By the great river in a boatman's hut.
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill.”

“ O there, great lord, doubtless,” Lavaine said, rapt 280
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
Toward greatness in its elder, “ you have fought.
O, tell us — for we live apart — you know
Of Arthur's glorious wars.” And Lancelot spoke
And answer'd him at full, as having been 285
With Arthur in the fight which all day long
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem ;
And in the four loud battles by the shore
Of Duglas ; that on Bassa ; then the war
That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts 290

Of Celidon the forest ; and again
 By Castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
 Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,
 Carved of one emerald centred in a sun
 Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed ; 295
 And at Caerleon had he helped his lord,
 When the strong neighings of the wild White Horse
 Set every gilded parapet shuddering ;
 And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,
 And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit, 300
 Where many a heathen fell ; " and on the mount
 Of Badon I myself beheld the King
 Charge at the head of all his Table Round,
 And all his legions crying Christ and him,
 And break them ; and I saw him, after, stand 305
 High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume
 Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,
 And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,
 ' They are broken, they are broken ! ' for the King,
 However mild he seems at home, nor cares 310
 For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts —
 For if his own knight casts him down, he laughs,
 Saying his knights are better men than he —
 Yet in this heathen war the fire of God
 Fills him : I never saw his like ; there lives 315
 No greater leader."

While he utter'd this,
 Low to her own heart said the lily maid,
 " Save your great self, fair lord ; " and when he fell
 From talk of war to traits of pleasantry —
 Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind — 320
 She still took note that when the living smile
 Died from his lips, across him came a cloud
 Of melancholy severe, from which again,

Whenever in her hovering to and fro
 The lily maid had striven to make him cheer, 325
 There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
 Of manners and of nature: and she thought
 That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.
 And all night long his face before her lived,
 As when a painter, poring on a face, 330
 Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
 Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
 The shape and color of a mind and life,
 Lives for his children, ever at its best
 And fullest; so the face before her lived, 335
 Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
 Of noble things, and held her from her sleep,
 Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought
 She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.
 First as in fear, step after step, she stole 340
 Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:
 Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,
 "This shield, my friend, where is it?" and Lavaine
 Past inward, as she came from out the tower.
 There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd 345
 The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
 Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew
 Nearer and stood. He look'd, and, more amazed
 Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
 The maiden standing in the dewy light. 350
 He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.
 Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
 For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
 Rapt on his face as if it were a god's.
 Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire 355
 That he should wear her favor at the tilt.
 She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
 "Fair lord, whose name I know not — noble it is,

I well believe, the noblest — will you wear
My favor at this tourney ? ” “ Nay,” said he, 360
“ Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favor of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those who know me know.”
“ Yea, so,” she answer’d ; “ then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord, 365
That those who know should know you.” And he turn’d
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answer’d : “ True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me :
What is it ? ” and she told him, “ A red sleeve 370
Broider’d with pearls,” and brought it : then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile
Saying, “ I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living,” and the blood
Sprang to her face and fill’d her with delight ; 375
But left her all the paler when Lavaine
Returning brought the yet-unblazon’d shield,
His brother’s ; which he gave to Lancelot,
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine :
“ Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield 380
In keeping till I come.” “ A grace to me,”
She answer’d, “ twice to-day. I am your squire ! ”
Whereat Lavaine said laughing : “ Lily maid,
For fear our people call you lily maid
In earnest, let me bring your color back ; 385
Once, twice, and thrice : now get you hence to bed : ”
So kiss’d her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
And thus they moved away : she staid a minute,
Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there —
Her bright hair blown about the serious face 390
Yet rosy-kindled with her brother’s kiss —
Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield
In silence, while she watch’d their arms far-off

Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.
 Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield, 395
 There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away
 Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,
 To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight
 Not far from Camelot, now for forty years 400
 A hermit, who had pray'd, labor'd and pray'd,
 And ever laboring had scoop'd himself
 In the white rock a chapel and a hall
 On massive columns, like a shore-cliff cave,
 And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry; 405
 The green light from the meadows underneath
 Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;
 And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees
 And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
 And thither wending there that night they bode. 410

But when the next day broke from underground,
 And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,
 They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away.
 Then Lancelot saying, "Hear, but hold my name
 Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake," 415
 Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,
 Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,
 But left him leave to stammer, "Is it indeed?"
 And after muttering, "The great Lancelot,"
 At last he got his breath and answer'd: "One, 420
 One have I seen — that other, our liege lord,
 The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,
 Of whom the people talk mysteriously,
 He will be there — then were I stricken blind
 That minute, I might say that I had seen." 425

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round
Lay like a rainbow fallen upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat 430
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung.
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make 435
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found
The new design wherein they lost themselves,
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work: 440
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said:
"Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance: but there is many a youth 445
Now crescent, who will come to all I am
And overcome it; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great:
There is the man." And Lavaine gaped upon him 450
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew; and then did either side,
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously 455
Shock that a man far-off might well perceive,
If any man that day were left afield,
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw

Which were the weaker; then he hurl'd into it 460
Against the stronger: little need to speak
Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,
Count, baron — whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists, 465
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
Should do and almost overdo the deeds
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, "Lo!
What is he? I do not mean the force alone —
The grace and versatility of the man! 470
Is it not Lancelot?" "When has Lancelot worn
Favor of any lady in the lists?
Not such his wont, as we that know him know."
"How then? who then?" a fury seized them all,
A fiery family passion for the name 475
Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.
They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds, and
thus,
Their plumes driven backward by the wind they made
In moving, all together down upon him
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North Sea, 480
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark
And him that helms it; so they overbore
Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear 485
Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear
Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head
Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully :
He bore a knight of old repute to the earth, 490
And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.

He up the side, sweating with agony, got,
 But thought to do while he might yet endure,
 And being lustily holpen by the rest,
 His party, — tho' it seem'd half-miracle 495
 To those he fought with, — drave his kith and kin,
 And all the Table Round that held the lists,
 Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew
 Proclaiming his the prize who wore the sleeve
 Of scarlet and the pearls; and all the knights, 500
 His party, cried, "Advance and take thy prize,
 The diamond;" but he answer'd: "Diamond me
 No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!
 Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!
 Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not." 505

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field
 With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
 There from his charger down he slid, and sat,
 Gasping to Sir Lavaine, "Draw the lance-head."
 "Ah, my sweet lord Sir Lancelot," said Lavaine, 510
 "I dread me, if I draw it, you will die."
 But he, "I die already with it: draw —
 Draw," — and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
 A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
 And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank 515
 For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.
 Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
 There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt
 Whether to live or die, for many a week
 Hid from the wild world's rumor by the grove 520
 Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,
 And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,
 His party, knights of utmost North and West,

Lords of waste marshes, kings of desolate isles, 525
 Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,
 "Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,
 Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize
 Untaken, crying that his prize is death."
 "Heaven hinder," said the King, "that such an one, 530
 So great a knight as we have seen to-day —
 He seem'd to me another Lancelot —
 Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot —
 He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore rise,
 O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight. 535
 Wounded and wearied, needs must he be near.
 I charge you that you get at once to horse.
 And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you
 Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given :
 His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him 540
 No customary honor : since the knight
 Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
 Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take
 This diamond, and deliver it, and return,
 And bring us where he is, and how he fares, 545
 And cease not from your quest until ye find."

So saying, from the carven flower above,
 To which it made a restless heart, he took
 And gave the diamond : then from where he sat
 At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose, 550
 With smiling face and frowning heart, a prince
 In the mid might and flourish of his May,
 Gawain, surnamed the Courteous, fair and strong,
 And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint,
 And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal 555
 Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
 Nor often loyal to his word, and now
 Wroth that the King's command to sally forth

In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave
The banquet and concourse of knights and kings. 560

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Past, thinking, "Is it Lancelot who hath come
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound, 565
And ridden away to die?" So fear'd the King,
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,
"Love, are you yet so sick?" "Nay, lord," she said.
"And where is Lancelot?" Then the Queen amazed, 570
"Was he not with you? won he not your prize?"
"Nay, but one like him." "Why, that like was he."
And when the King demanded how she knew,
Said: "Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk 575
That men went down before his spear at a touch,
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name
Conquer'd; and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, even the King, and to this end
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound, 580
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd;
And added, 'Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain
Of purer glory.'"

Then replied the King: 585
"Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.
Surely his King and most familiar friend
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed, 590

Albeit I know my knights fantastical,
 So fine a fear in our large Lancelot
 Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains
 But little cause for laughter: his own kin —
 Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this! — 595
 His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;
 So that he went sore wounded from the field.
 Yet good news too; for goodly hopes are mine
 That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
 He wore, against his wont, upon his helm 600
 A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,
 Some gentle maiden's gift."

"Yea, lord," she said,
 "Thy hopes are mine," and saying that, she choked,
 And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,
 Past to her chamber, and there flung herself 605
 Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
 And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,
 And shriek'd out "Traitor!" to the unhearing wall,
 Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
 And moved about her palace, proud and pale. 610

Gawain the while thro' all the region round
 Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,
 Touch'd at all points except the poplar grove,
 And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat;
 Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid 615
 Glanced at, and cried, "What news from Camelot, lord?
 What of the knight with the red sleeve?" "He won."
 "I knew it," she said. "But parted from the jousts
 Hurt in the side;" whereat she caught her breath;
 Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go; 620
 Thereon she smote her hand; wellnigh she swoon'd:
 And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came

The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the prince
Reported who he was, and on what quest
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find 625
The victor, but had ridden a random round
To seek him, and had wearied of the search.
To whom the Lord of Astolat: "Bide with us,
And ride no more at random, noble prince!
Here was the knight, and here he left a shield; 630
This will he send or come for: furthermore
Our son is with him; we shall hear anon,
Needs must we hear." To this the courteous prince
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it, 635
And staid; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine;
Where could be found face daintier? then her shape
From forehead down to foot, perfect — again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd:
"Well — if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!" 640
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and low smiles, and golden eloquence, 645
And amorous adulation, till the maid
Rebell'd against it, saying to him: "Prince,
O loyal nephew of our noble King,
Why ask you not to see the shield he left, 649
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your King,
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove
No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went
To all the winds?" "Nay, by mine head," said he,
"I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven, 655
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes;
But an ye will it let me see the shield."

And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
 Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
 Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd : 660
 "Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!"
 "And right was I," she answer'd merrily, "I,
 Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all."
 "And if *I* dream'd," said Gawain, "that you love
 This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, ye know it! 665
 Speak, therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?"
 Full simple was her answer: "What know I?
 My brethren have been all my fellowship;
 And I, when often they have talk'd of love,
 Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd, 670
 Meseem'd, of what they knew not; so myself—
 I know not if I know what true love is,
 But if I know, then, if I love not him,
 I know there is none other I can love."
 "Yea, by God's death," said he, "ye love him well, 675
 But would not, knew ye what all others know,
 And whom he loves." "So be it," cried Elaine,
 And lifted her fair face and moved away:
 But he pursued her, calling, "Stay a little!
 One golden minute's grace! he wore your sleeve: 680
 Would he break faith with one I may not name?
 Must our true man change like a leaf at last?
 Nay—like enow: why then, far be it from me
 To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves!
 And, damsel, for I deem you know full well 685
 Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave
 My quest with you; the diamond also: here!
 For if you love, it will be sweet to give it;
 And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
 From your own hand; and whether he love or not, 690
 A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well
 A thousand times!—a thousand times farewell!

Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two
 May meet at court hereafter : there, I think,
 So ye will learn the courtesies of the court, 695
 We two shall know each other."

Then he gave,
 And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,
 The diamond, and all wearied of the quest
 Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went
 A true-love ballad, lightly rode away. 700

Thence to the court he past ; there told the King
 What the King knew, " Sir Lancelot is the knight."
 And added, " Sire, my liege, so much I learnt ;
 But fail'd to find him, tho' I rode all round
 The region : but I lighted on the maid 705
 Whose sleeve he wore ; she loves him ; and to her,
 Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,
 I gave the diamond : she will render it ;
 For by mine head she knows his hiding-place."

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied : 710
 " Too courteous truly ! ye shall go no more
 On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
 Obedience is the courtesy due to kings."

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,
 For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word, 715
 Linger'd that other, staring after him ;
 Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad
 About the maid of Astolat, and her love.
 All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed :
 " The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot, 720
 Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat."
 Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all

Had marvel what the maid might be, but most
 Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame
 Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news 725
 She, that had heard the noise of it before,
 But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,
 Marr'd her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.
 So ran the tale like fire about the court,
 Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared : 730
 Till even the knights at banquet twice or thrice
 Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,
 And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid
 Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat
 With lips severely placid, felt the knot 735
 Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
 Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor
 Beneath the banquet, where the meats became
 As wormwood and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat, 740
 Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept
 The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,
 Crept to her father, while he mused alone,
 Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said :
 " Father, you call me wilful, and the fault 745
 Is yours who let me have my will, and now,
 Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits ? "
 " Nay," said he, " surely." " Wherefore, let me hence,"
 She answer'd, " and find out our dear Lavaine."
 " Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine : 750
 Bide," answer'd he : " we needs must hear anon
 Of him, and of that other." " Ay," she said,
 " And of that other, for I needs must hence
 And find that other, whereso'er he be,
 And with mine own hand give his diamond to him, 755
 Lest I be found as faithless in the quest

As yon proud prince who left the quest to me.
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Death-pale, for the lack of gentle maiden's aid. 760
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,
My father, to be sweet and serviceable
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know,
When these have worn their tokens: let me hence,
I pray you." Then her father nodding said: 765
"Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,
Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it —
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
For any mouth to gape for save a queen's — 770
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,
Being so very wilful you must go."

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slept away,
And while she made her ready for her ride
Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear, 775
"Being so very wilful you must go,"
And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,
"Being so very wilful you must die."
But she was happy enough and shook it off,
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us; 780
And in her heart she answer'd it and said,
"What matter, so I help him back to life?"
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
To Camelot, and before the city-gates 785
Came on her brother with a happy face,
Making a roan horse caper and curvet
For pleasure all about a field of flowers;
Whom when she saw, "Lavaine," she cried, "Lavaine,
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?" He amazed, 790

"Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!
 How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?"
 But when the maid had told him all her tale,
 Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods
 Left them, and under the strange-statued gate, 795
 Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,
 Past up the still rich city to his kin,
 His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot;
 And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
 Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque 800
 Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,
 Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
 Stream'd from it still; and in her heart she laughed,
 Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
 But meant once more perchance to tourney in it. 805
 And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,
 His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands
 Lay naked on the wolf-skin, and a dream
 Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
 Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn, 810
 Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
 Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.
 The sound not wonted in a place so still
 Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes
 Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying, 815
 "Your prize, the diamond sent you by the King."
 His eyes glisten'd: she fancied, "Is it for me?"
 And when the maid had told him all the tale
 Of king and prince, the diamond sent, the quest
 Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt 820
 Full lowly by the corners of his bed,
 And laid the diamond in his open hand.
 Her face was near, and as we kiss the child
 That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.
 At once she slipt like water to the floor. 825

“Alas,” he said, “your ride hath wearied you.
Rest must you have.” “No rest for me,” she said;
“Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.”
What might she mean by that? his large black eyes,
Yet larger thro’ his leanness, dwelt upon her, 830
Till all her heart’s sad secret blazed itself
In the heart’s colors on her simple face;
And Lancelot look’d and was perplexed in mind,
And being weak in body said no more,
But did not love the color; woman’s love, 835
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn’d
Sighing, and feign’d a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro’ the fields,
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
Far up the dim rich city to her kin; 840
There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past
Down thro’ the dim rich city to the fields,
Thence to the cave. So day by day she past
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro
Gliding, and every day she tended him, 845
And likewise many a night; and Lancelot
Would, tho’ he call’d his wound a little hurt
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem
Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid 850
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man’s first fall,
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love 855
Upbore her; till the hermit, skill’d in all
The simples and the science of that time,
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,

Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine, 860
Would listen for her coming and regret
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,
And loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death 865
In any knightly fashion for her sake.
And peradventure had he seen her first
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him, 870
His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
These, as but born of sickness, could not live; 875
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,
Full often the bright image of one face,
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace 880
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,
And drave her ere her time across the fields 885
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmur'd, "Vain, in vain: it cannot be.
He will not love me: how then? must I die?"
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,
That has but one plain passage of few notes, 890
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid

Went half the night repeating, "Must I die?"
And now to right she turn'd, and now to left, 895
And found no ease in turning or in rest;
And "Him or death," she mutter'd, "death or him,"
Again and like a burthen, "Him or death."

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,
To Astolat returning rode the three. 900
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought,
"If I be loved, these are my festal robes,
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall." 905
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid
That she should ask some goodly gift of him
For her own self or hers: "and do not shun
To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
Such service have ye done me that I make 910
My will of yours, and prince and lord am I
In mine own land, and what I will I can."
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
But like a ghost without the power to speak.
And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish, 915
And bode among them yet a little space
Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced
He found her in among the garden yews,
And said, "Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I go to-day:" then out she brake: 920
"Going? and we shall never see you more.
And I must die for want of one bold word."
"Speak: that I live to hear," he said, "is yours."
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
"I have gone mad. I love you: let me die." 925
"Ah, sister," answer'd Lancelot, "what is this?"
And innocently extending her white arms,

“Your love,” she said, “your love — to be your wife.”
And Lancelot answer’d, “Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine; 930
But now there never will be wife of mine.”
“No, no,” she cried, “I care not to be wife,
But to be with you still, to see your face,
To serve you, and to follow you thro’ the world.”
And Lancelot answer’d: “Nay, the world, the world, 935
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
To blare its own interpretation — nay,
Full ill then should I quit your brother’s love,
And your good father’s kindness.” And she said, 940
“Not to be with you, not to see your face —
Alas for me then, my good days are done!”
“Nay, noble maid,” he answer’d, “ten times nay!
This is not love, but love’s first flash in youth,
Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self; 945
And you yourself will smile at your own self
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age.
And then will I, for true you are and sweet
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood, 950
More specially should your good knight be poor,
Endow you with broad land and territory
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
So that would make you happy: furthermore,
Even to the death, as tho’ ye were my blood, 955
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
And more than this I cannot.”

While he spoke
She neither blush’d nor shook, but deathly-pale
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied, 960

“Of all this will I nothing ;” and so fell,
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom thro’ those black walls of yew
Their talk had pierced, her father: “Ay, a flash,
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead. 965
Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion.”

Lancelot said,

“That were against me: what I can I will ;”
And there that day remain’d, and toward even 970
Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid,
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield ;
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look’d
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone. 975
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound ;
And she by tact of love was well aware
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bade farewell, but sadly rode away. 980
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat :
His very shield was gone ; only the case,
Her own poor work, her empty labor, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture form’d 985
And grew between her and the pictured wall.
Then came her father, saying in low tones,
“Have comfort,” whom she greeted quietly.
Then came her brethren saying, “Peace to thee,
Sweet sister,” whom she answer’d with all calm. 990
But when they left her to herself again,

Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd; the owls
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms
Of evening and the moanings of the wind.

995

And in those days she made a little song,
And call'd her song "The Song of Love and Death,"
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

"Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

1000

"Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

1005

"Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away;
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

"I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die."

1010

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
With shuddering, "Hark the Phantom of the house
That ever shrieks before a death," and call'd
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo! the red-blood light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, "Let me die!"

1015

As when we dwell upon a word we know, 1020
Repeating, till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought,
“Is this Elaine?” till back the maiden fell,
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay, 1025
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said: “Sweet brothers, yesternight
I seem’d a curious little maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
And when ye used to take me with the flood 1030
Up the great river in the boatman’s boat.
Only ye would not pass beyond the cape
That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
And yet I cried because ye would not pass 1035
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
Until we found the palace of the King.
And yet ye would not; but this night I dream’d
That I was all alone upon the flood,
And then I said, ‘Now shall I have my will:’ 1040
And there I woke, but still the wish remain’d.
So let me hence that I may pass at last
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
Until I find the palace of the King.
There will I enter in among them all, 1045
And no man there will dare to mock at me;
But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,
But there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me;
Gawain, who bade a thousand farewells to me,
Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bade me one: 1050
And there the King will know me and my love,
And there the Queen herself will pity me,
And all the gentle court will welcome me,
And after my long voyage I shall rest!”

“Peace,” said her father, “O my child, ye seem 1055
Light-headed, for what force is yours to go
So far, being sick ? and wherefore would ye look
On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all ?”

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,
And bluster into stormy sobs and say : 1060
“I never loved him : an I meet with him,
I care not howsoever great he be,
Then will I strike at him and strike him down ;
Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,
For this discomfort he hath done the house.” 1065

To whom the gentle sister made reply :
“Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot’s fault
Not to love me than it is mine to love
Him of all men who seems to me the highest.” 1070

“Highest ?” the father answer’d, echoing “highest ?” —
He meant to break the passion in her — “nay,
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest ;
But this I know, for all the people know it,
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame : 1075
And she returns his love in open shame ;
If this be high, what is it to be low ?”

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat :
“Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I
For anger : these are slanders ; never yet 1080
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.
He makes no friend who never made a foe.
But now it is my glory to have loved
One peerless, without stain : so let me pass,
My father, howsoe’er I seem to you, 1085

Not all unhappy, having loved God's best
And greatest, tho' my love had no return :
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,
Thanks, but you work against your own desire ;
For if I could believe the things you say 1090
I should but die the sooner ; wherefore cease,
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man
Hither, and let me shrive me clean and die."

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
She, with a face bright as for sin forgiven, 1095
Besought Lavaine to write as she devised
A letter, word for word ; and when he ask'd,
"Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord ?
Then will I bear it gladly ;" she replied,
"For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world, 1100
But I myself must bear it." Then he wrote
The letter she devised ; which being writ
And folded, "O sweet father, tender and true,
Deny me not," she said — "ye never yet
Denied my fancies — this, however strange, 1105
My latest : lay the letter in my hand
A little ere I die, and close the hand
Upon it ; I shall guard it even in death.
And when the heat has gone from out my heart,
Then take the little bed on which I died 1110
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's
For richness, and me also like the Queen
In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier
To take me to the river, and a barge 1115
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.
I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,
And none of you can speak for me so well.

And therefore let our dumb old man alone 1120
Go with me; he can steer and row, and he
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors."

She ceased: her father promised; whereupon
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood. 1125
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh
Her father laid the letter in her hand,
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground, 1130
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier
Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,
Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay. 1135
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed, 1140
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings,
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her,
"Sister, farewell forever," and again,
"Farewell, sweet sister," parted all in tears. 1145
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood —
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter — all her bright hair streaming down —
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold 1150
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face

Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved 1155
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last
The price of half a realm; his costly gift,
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
With deaths of others, and almost his own,
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds ; for he saw 1160
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
With such and so unmoved a majesty
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet 1165
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side, 1170
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd: "Queen,
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
Take, what I had not won except for you,
These jewels, and make me happy, making them 1175
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words ;
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
In speaking, yet O, grant my worship of it 1180
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words,
Perchance, we both can pardon ; but, my Queen,
I hear of rumors flying thro' your court.
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,
Should have in it an absoluter trust 1185

To make up that defect: let rumors be:
 When did not rumors fly? these, as I trust
 That you trust me in your own nobleness,
 I may not well believe that you believe."

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen 1190
 Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
 Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
 Till all the place whereon she stood was green;
 Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand
 Received at once and laid aside the gems 1195
 There on a table near her, and replied:

"It may be I am quicker of belief
 Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.
 Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.
 This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill, 1200
 It can be broken easier. I for you
 This many a year have done despite and wrong
 To one whom ever in my heart of hearts
 I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?
 Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth 1205
 Being your gift, had you not lost your own.
 To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
 Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!
 For her! for your new fancy. Only this
 Grant me, I pray you: have your joys apart. 1210
 I doubt not that, however changed, you keep
 So much of what is graceful: and myself
 Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy
 In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule;
 So cannot speak my mind. An end to this! 1215
 A strange one! yet I take it with Amen.
 So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;
 Deck her with these; tell her, she shines me down:

An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck 1220
O, as much fairer — as a faith once fair
Was richer than these diamonds — hers, not mine —
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will —
She shall not have them."

Saying which she seized, 1225

And, thro' the casement standing wide for heat,
Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the stream.
Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,
Diamonds to meet them, and they passed away.
Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain 1230
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
Close underneath his eyes, and right across
Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night. 1235

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away
To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,
On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
There two stood arm'd, and kept the door; to whom,
All up the marble stair, tier over tier, 1240
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd,
"What is it?" but that oarsman's haggard face,
As hard and still as is the face that men
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks
On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said: 1245
"He is enchanted, cannot speak — and see,
Look how she sleeps — the Fairy Queen, so fair!
Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?
Or come to take the King to Fairyland?"

For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
But that he passes into Fairyland." 1250

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man
From the half-face to the full eye, and rose
And pointed to the damsel and the doors. 1255
So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
And reverently they bore her into hall.
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
And Lancelot later came and mused at her, 1260
And last the Queen herself, and pitied her;
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
Stooped, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

"Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat, 1265
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death.
And therefore to our Lady Guinevere, 1270
And to all other ladies, I make moan:
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
Pray for my soul thou, too, Sir Lancelot,
As thou art a knight peerless."

Thus he read;
And ever in the reading lords and dames 1275
Wept, looking often from his face who read
To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips
Who had devised the letter moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all : 1280
“ My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,
Know that for this most gentle maiden’s death
Right heavy am I ; for good she was and true,
But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known. 1285
Yet to be loved makes not to love again ;
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave
No cause, not willingly, for such a love.
To this I call my friends in testimony, 1290
Her brethren, and her father, who himself
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,
To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature : what I could, I did.
I left her and I bade her no farewell ; 1295
Tho’, had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And help’d her from herself.”

Then said the Queen —
Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm :
“ Ye might at least have done her so much grace, 1300
Fair lord, as would have help’d her from her death.”
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,
He adding :
“ Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.
Then might she follow me thro’ the world, she ask’d ; 1305
It could not be. I told her that her love
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down,
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame
Toward one more worthy of her — then would I,
More specially were he she wedded poor, 1310
Estate them with large land and territory

In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,
To keep them in all joyance: more than this
I could not; this she would not, and she died."

He pausing, Arthur answer'd: "O my knight, 1315
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,
To see that she be buried worshipfully."

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went 1320
The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen. 1325
And when the knights had laid her comely head
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,
Then Arthur spake among them: "Let her tomb
Be costly, and her image thereupon,
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet 1330
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.
And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb
In letters gold and azure!" which was wrought
Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames 1335
And people, from the high door streaming, brake
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, "Lancelot,
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love." 1340
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,
"That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven."
But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
Approach'd him, and with full affection said:

"Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have 1345
 Most joy and most affiance, for I know
 What thou hast been in battle by my side,
 And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt
 Strike down the lusty and long practised knight
 And let the younger and unskill'd go by 1350
 To win his honor and to make his name,
 And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
 Made to be loved; but now I would to God,
 Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,
 Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems, 1355
 By God for thee alone, and from her face,
 If one may judge the living by the dead,
 Delicately pure and marvellously fair,
 Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
 Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons 1360
 Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
 My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake."

Then answer'd Lancelot: "Fair she was, my King,
 Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.
 To doubt her fairness were to want an eye, 1365
 To doubt her pureness were to want a heart —
 Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
 Could bind him, but free love will not be bound."

"Free love, so bound, were freest," said the King.
 "Let love be free; free love is for the best: 1370
 And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,
 What should be best, if not so pure a love
 Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee
 She fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,
 Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know." 1375

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,
 And at the inrunning of a little brook

Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd
 The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes
 And saw the barge that brought her moving down, 1380
 Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said
 Low in himself: "Ah, simple heart and sweet,
 Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love
 Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?
 Ay, that will I. Farewell too — now at last — 1385
 Farewell, fair lily. 'Jealousy in love?'
 Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?
 Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
 May not your crescent fear for name and fame,
 Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes? 1390
 Why did the King dwell on my name to me?
 Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
 Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
 Caught from his mother's arms — the wondrous one
 Who passes thro' the vision of the night — 1395
 She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns
 Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn
 She kiss'd me saying, 'Thou art fair, my child,
 As a king's son,' and often in her arms
 She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere. 1400
 Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!
 For what am I? what profits me my name
 Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
 Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain:
 Now grown a part of me: but what use in it? 1405
 To make men worse by making my sin known?
 Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
 Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
 Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
 These bonds that so defame me: not without 1410
 She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,
 Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,

I pray Him, send a sudden angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills."

1415

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

The Fall of the Round Table and of Arthur's Model Realm. — With "The Passing of Arthur" the story of the Idylls comes to an end. The moral taint engendered by the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere, which first showed itself in "Geraint and Enid," and gathered strength in the succeeding Idylls, has infused its deadly poison throughout the system. The splendid circle of knights which Arthur had gathered around him, bound by vows of utter hardihood, utter gentleness, utter faithfulness in love, and uttermost obedience to the king, has been broken to fragments. The glory of the Round Table is no more, and the Order is split into feuds. The model realm of all that was noble falls in ruins, and with it the hopes of Arthur.

The Simplifying of the Story. — As the story of the Idylls draws to a close, it gradually divests itself of the many minor characters and details which the unfolding of the drama has introduced upon the scene. The throng of knights and ladies and miscellaneous personages has passed out of sight. Guinevere has retired to a nunnery to spend the rest of her days, and even Lancelot is but a memory. The grand central figure who dominates the whole system is left, forlorn and sad, with only one faithful knight, the first and latest, Sir Bedivere. Even in

this Idyll the simplifying process goes on, serving to heighten the dignity and impressiveness of the scene. "The flood of poetry which seemed to run shallower in some of the earlier poems, being spread over a wide area and divided into numerous rills, is now gathered up into a single stream, which is so much the more effective as it is deeper and more powerful."

The Final Act of the Drama. — "The Passing of Arthur" tells of the last battle and the end of Arthur's earthly career. Bereft of all who are dear to him, the king leads his forces to the west in pursuit of the traitor, Modred, and his followers. The two opposing hosts meet on the plains of Lyonesse, and a great battle ensues. Arthur slays Modred with his own hand, and is himself mortally wounded. He is taken to a small chapel near by, and thence is carried to the island valley of Avilion. Though harassed by the failure of all his cherished hopes, and racked by pangs of doubt that almost conquer faith, he does not despair. He can still say

"Nay — God my Christ — I pass but shall not die.

* * * * *

King am I, whatsoever be their cry ;"

and his last act in striking down the traitor of his house fitly crowns a life of kingly and knightly achievement.

"The Passing of Arthur" is in many ways the grandest of the Idylls. The story is taken, with some changes, from the twenty-first book of Malory. Lines 170–440 form the original fragment, "Morte d'Arthur," published in 1842, which, although written so many years before the rest

of the Idylls, is in the best Tennysonian vein. It is, as the poet himself classed it, "a Homeric echo." In its mastery of language, simplicity of diction, fine descriptive power, harmonious rhythm, and sustained dignity of tone, it reaches the highest rank of poetry. In "The Passing of Arthur" Tennyson has kept close to his original, both in his choice of incident and in the wording of many passages. But in addition to this he seems to have caught the spirit of weirdness, so characteristic of Keltic literature, which throws around the story a charm unique in itself. The style of the poem is purposely archaic; its whole tone is dignified and impressive; it contains many of the most picturesque passages to be found in the Idylls; it is replete with lofty sentiments that could come only from a great soul. It is the fitting close of a grand epic.



THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.



That story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

5

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King :

“ I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful ?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is :
Perchance, because we see not to the close ; —
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain :
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.

10

15

20

25

My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death:
Nay — God my Christ — I pass but shall not die.”

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd 30
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling: “Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee. 35
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight!”
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream 40
Shrill'd; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and call'd: 45
“Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
Thine, Gawain, was the voice — are these dim cries
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?”

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake: 50
“O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;
But in their stead thy name and glory cling
To all high places like a golden cloud
Forever: but as yet thou shalt not pass. 55
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise —
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,

And with him many of thy people, and knights 60
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old."

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere: 65
"Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine 70
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way 75
Thro' this blind haze which, ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world."

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league, 80
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse —
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast 85
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven 90
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.

Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A death-white mist slept over sand and sea, 95
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist, 100
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base, 105
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battle-axes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks 110
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs 115
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death
Or death-like swoon, thus over all that shore, 120
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the north, and blew
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide 125
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field

Of battle : but no man was moving there ;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen ; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro 130
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be. 135

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King :

“ Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move, 140
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as tho' they had not died for me ? —
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be king ; 145
Behold, I seem but king among the dead.”

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere : “ My King ;
King everywhere ! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as king.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live 150
Who love thee ; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house.”

Then spake the King : “ My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house 155
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who swear my vows,

Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me king.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd, 160
That quick or dead thou holdest me for king.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass." And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege 165
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and, all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd 170
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him, 175
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full. 180

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep — the men I loved. I think that we 185
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made, — 190

Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more; but, let what will be be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur, 195
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword — and how I row'd across 200
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known.
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere; 205
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word."

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm —
A little thing may harm a wounded man; 210
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men, 215
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur, 220
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth

And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt;
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work 225
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd 230
There in the many-knotted water-flags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave? 235
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag."

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale: 240
"Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight;
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere. 245
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time 250
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fixt in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,

How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud : 255

“And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost forever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done ? 260
What harm, undone ? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself ?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does 265
What record or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumors of a doubt ? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms, 270
Saying : ‘ King Arthur’s sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely Maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills.’
So might some old man speak in the aftertime 275
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honor and much fame were lost.”

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King. 280

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :
“What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?”

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
“I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.” 285

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
 "Ah miserable, and unkind, untrue,
 Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
 Authority forgets a dying king,
 Laid widow'd of the power in his eye 290
 That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
 For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
 In whom should meet the offices of all,
 Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
 Either from lust of gold, or like a girl 295
 Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
 Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
 And the third time may prosper, get thee hence;
 But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
 I will arise and slay thee with my hands." 300

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
 And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
 Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
 And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
 Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon, 305
 And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
 Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
 Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
 By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
 So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur; 310
 But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
 And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
 And lightly went the other to the King. 315

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
 "Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
 Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
 “ Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
 Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
 Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
 Not tho’ I live three lives of mortal men,
 So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
 Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;
 But when I look’d again, behold an arm,
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
 That caught him by the hilt, and brandish’d him
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere.”

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard : 330
 "My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone.
 Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
 And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear
 My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die."

So saying, from the pavement he half rose, 335
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words ; 340
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,

Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right 355
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels —
And on a sudden, lo, the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon ! 360

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them ; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream — by these 365
Three queens with crowns of gold : and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes, 370
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, "Place me in the barge."
So to the barge they came. There those three queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she that rose the tallest of them all 375
And fairest laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white 380
And colorless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops

Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls —
That made his forehead like a rising sun 385
High from the dais-throne — were parch'd with dust,
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mixt with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest, 390
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
“ Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go? 395
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led 400
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years, 405
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.”

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
“ The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. 410
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer 415
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice

Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer 420
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
(Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest — if indeed I go — 425
For all my mind is clouded with a doubt —
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns 430
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death, 435
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away. 440

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groan'd, "The King is gone."
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
"From the great deep to the great deep he goes." 445

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag,
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried:

“ He passes to be king among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound 450
He comes again; but — if he come no more —
O me, be yon dark queens in yon black boat,
Who shriek’d and wail’d, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends 455
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need ? ”

Then from the dawn it seem’d there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice 460
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King, 465
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

NOTES.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE.

Line 1. As in a former Idyll, "Geraint and Enid," the poem opens at a central point. Elaine already has the shield of Lancelot in her charge. At line 28 the poet takes us back, telling by episode the circumstances leading up to this point.

Line 2. "Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat," called in the Romances Elaine le Blank (*blanche*, *white*). Compare Malory's account, "Morte Darthur," Book XVIII., Chaps. VIII.-XX.

Astolat, according to Malory, is now Gilford, or Guildford, in Surrey, thirty miles southwest of London. Tennyson's Astolat is probably an imaginary place, which, from line 1147, would seem to be on the Thames, below London.

Lines 7-9. It was doubtless a favorite occupation of many a damsel to make and embroider a cover for the shield of her favorite warrior.

Line 10. "Of her wit." Elaine embroidered on the case all the figures on the shield, and then added a border of her own fancy.

Line 12. "Yellow-throated." A good illustration of the poet's accurate observation of Nature.

Line 22. "Caerlyle." Carlisle in Cumberland, frequently mentioned as the scene of Arthur's exploits, and, according to some accounts, Arthur's capital.

Line 23. "Caerleon." Caerleon-on-Usk in South Wales, generally considered as Arthur's chief city and capital. One of his twelve great battles was fought here. Compare "Geraint and Enid," lines 145-146:—

"For Arthur on the Whitsuntide before
Held court at Caerleon-on-Usk."

"Camelot." Generally supposed to have been a town in southwestern England, and famous as the place where Arthur frequently held court, and where the Round Table met. Tennyson's Camelot is

one of Arthur's chief cities, and, like Astolat, a mystic city, the location of which is left unfixed.

Line 27. "Him." Lancelot. An ambiguous use of the pronoun by the poet.

Line 35. "Lyonnesse." A fabulous district, supposed to have stretched away to the south and west of Cornwall, but now to be covered by the sea.

Line 39. The following episode of the diamonds appears to be a coinage of Tennyson's imagination, as there is no foundation for it in the older legends. It is evidently introduced here for purposes of contrast, of which the poet is so fond. To offset the maiden bower, we have the horror of the haunted glen. Instead of the maiden herself and her love dream, we have the death struggles of the warriors. The whole description forms a clear-cut picture, which the reader may easily grasp.

Line 65. "The heathen." The Saxons with whom Arthur was so much at war.

Line 71. "To snare her royal fancy." Explain the figure.

Lines 75-76. "The place," etc. London.

Line 78. "For she had been sick." Compare Malory, XVIII. 8: "So King Arthur made him ready to depart to these jousts, and would have had the queen with him; but that time she would not she said, for she was sick, and might not ride at that time, . . . and many deemed the queen would not be there because of Sir Launcelot du Lake, for Sir Launcelot would not ride with the king; for he said that he was not whole of the wound the which Sir Mador had given him. Wherefore the king was heavy and passing wroth."

Line 91. "The tale of diamonds," *i.e.* the full number.

Line 94. "Lets me from the saddle," *i.e.* hinders me from, etc. *Let* is from the Old English verb *lettan*, to make late.

Line 97. "To blame," etc. These lines illustrate how closely Tennyson follows Malory. Compare Malory, XVIII. 8: "Sir Launcelot, ye are greatly to blame, thus to hold you behind my lord: what trow ye, what will your enemies and mine say and deem? nought else but see how Sir Launcelot holdeth him ever behind the king and so doth the queen, for that they would be together; and thus will they say, said the queen to Launcelot, have ye no doubt thereof."

Line 106. "The myriad cricket." Compare "Enoch Arden," line 579:—

"The myriad shrieking of wheeling waterfowl."

Compare line 169 below.

Line 111. "Many a bard," etc. Compare "Merlin and Vivien," lines 7-15.

Lines 120-139. These lines portray in a striking manner the character of Tennyson's Guinevere.

Line 130. These vows are described in "Gareth and Lynette," lines 542-544, as vows

"Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the king."

In the same poem, line 267, Merlin calls them

"Such vows as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep."

In "The Last Tournament," lines 683-684, Tristram calls the vows

"Inviolable vows,
Which flesh and blood perforce would violate."

Line 132. Arthur appears to Guinevere as Maud did to her lover. Compare "Maud," I. 2:—

"Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,
Dead perfection, no more."

Guinevere cannot love such dead perfection, for the man who loves her "must have a touch of earth." Had Arthur possessed this he would not have lost her.

Lines 143-144. "Who honors his own word
As if it were his God's."

In "Guinevere," line 470, we have:—

"To honor his own word as if his God's."

Also in "The Coming of Arthur":—

"And Arthur said, 'Man's word is God in man.'"

Line 161. "The rarer-foot." More rarely trodden by foot.

Line 163. "Lost in fancy, lost his way." A good example of one

of Tennyson's characteristics, a sort of sound-play, the repetition of a word in a slightly different sense.

Line 169. "Myriad-wrinkled." A Homeric epithet. Tennyson has "myriad-minded," "myriad-rolling," and "myriad-room'd."

Lines 180-181. "And by what name
Livest between the lips?"

A Virgilian expression, meaning "by what name art thou known among men?"

Line 218. "An if" = if. "An" is an old word for "and," used in the sense of "if." When this force of "an" was forgotten, an "if" was placed after it.

Line 233. "Slightly . . . slight." See note on line 163.

Line 235. Compare Lancelot's courtesy with that of Gawain in line 635 :—

"Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it."

Lines 236-240. An example of Tennyson's polished art of expression.

Lines 243-257. This description of Lancelot is highly dramatic and noteworthy. The poet presents the noble soul at war within itself, marring his face and marking it ere his time; and ends with the singularly graphic picture, "marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man," etc., which words seem to be, as Littledale remarks, a reminiscence of Sir Ector's words when Lancelot is dead (Malory, XXI. 13): "Ah, Lancelot!" he said, "thou were head of all the Christian knights; and now, I dare say," said Sir Ector, "thou, Sir Lancelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand: and thou were the courtliest knight that ever bare shield: . . . and thou were the goodliest person ever came among press of knights: and thou were the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies."

Line 263. "As in a smaller time." Does this mean in times previous to King Arthur, or in our own time? (Littledale.)

Line 265. "Kindly . . . kind." Still another instance of sound-play. Compare "In Memoriam," LXVI. 5, 7:—

"The shade by which my life was crost

* * * * *

Has made me kindlier with my kind."

Line 279. "The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill." Alludes to the twelve great battles which Arthur is said to have fought against the Saxons, the twelfth and last being at the hill of Badon. See line 301 below.

Line 287. It is impossible to fix with any certainty the locality of Arthur's battles. The list given by Lancelot is first found in Nennius (ninth century), whom Tennyson follows. Nennius gives the location of these battles as follows: the first at the mouth of the river Gleni; the second, third, fourth, and fifth on a river called by the Britons Duglas, in the region Linius; the sixth on the river Bassas; the seventh in the wood Celidon; the eighth was near Gurnion Castle, where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin upon his shoulders, and through its power put the Saxons to flight; the ninth was at Caer Leon; the tenth was on the banks of the river Trat Treuroit; the eleventh was on the mountain Breguvin; and the twelfth was a most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon, and won a great victory. The last is the only one of the twelve battles that is not regarded as mythical.

Line 293. According to Nennius, Arthur bore the image of the Virgin Mary on his shoulders. Geoffrey of Monmouth says that the picture of the Virgin was on Arthur's shield. Tennyson seems to have been thinking of the famous "Russian emerald," said to have been sent originally by Pilate to Tiberius. It is supposed to have the head of Christ carved upon it. But the poet has taken the detail of the head on the cuirass from Spenser's Arthur ("Faery Queene," I. VII. 29):—

"Athwart his breast a bauldrick brave he ware
That shind, like twinkling stars, with stones most pretious rare:
And in the midst thereof one pretious stone
Of wondrous worth, and eke of wondrous might,
Shapt like a Ladie's head, exceeding shone."

Line 295. "That lighten'd as he breathed," *i.e.* gleamed with the rising and falling of his breast.

Line 297. "The wild White Horse." The emblem of the Saxons. Compare "The Holy Grail," line 312, and "Guinevere," line 15.

Line 306. "High on a heap of slain." According to Nennius, in the battle of the hill of Badon Arthur slew by his own hand nine hundred and forty of the enemy, "no one but the Lord affording him assistance."

Line 314. "The fire of God." In "The Coming of Arthur," line 127, Lancelot says to Arthur:—

" . . . The fire of God
Descends upon thee in the battlefield: "

meaning a divinely inspired ardor. So in the Bible, fire is used as a physical symbol of the presence of God.

Line 325. "To make him cheer." An expression often used by Malory, meaning, to make him welcome.

Line 328. "That all was nature," *i.e.* all sprang from his real feelings.

Lines 345-354. These lines present a beautiful picture in contrast with a picture equally beautiful in lines 388-396. This is an excellent illustration of Tennyson's pictorial mode of treatment, which seems, in places, almost to dominate over the working out of the story.

Line 356. "Her favor." At tournaments a knight often wore in his helmet some small article of his lady-love, as a token of his regard for her.

Line 357. "She braved a riotous heart in asking for it." A fine figure expressive of the struggle between her love and her maidenly modesty.

Line 396. "So lived in fantasy." The repetition of this phrase from line 27 above recalls us to that point in the story.

Line 406. Littledale compares the fine description of the "green light from the meadows underneath," striking up into the chalky roof of the cave and illuminating it, to Shelley's "Dream of the Unknown."

"Floating water-lilies, broad and bright,
Which lit the oak that overhung the hedge
With moonlight beams of their own watery light."

Line 409. "A noise of falling showers." An archaic use of "noise" in the sense of a pleasant sound, frequent in the older poets.

Line 411. "One of those faint Homeric echoes that become fainter in the latter Idylls." — Littledale.

Line 415. "Lancelot of the Lake." See introduction.

Line 422. "Pendragon," literally, "dragon's head," meaning "chief war-leader," a title given to Uther, Arthur's reputed father, and from him descending to Arthur.

Lines 448-449. Doubtless a reminiscence of Plato. Socrates in Plato's *Apology*, IX. remarks: "That man is wisest who knows that in reality he is of no worth at all with respect to wisdom."

Lines 468-498. Tennyson in these lines follows very closely Malory's account of the tilt. See Malory XVIII. 11.

Lines 480-482. Tennyson in 1882 wrote to Mr. S. E. Dawson: "There was a period in my life, when, as an artist, Turner, for

example, takes rough sketches of landscapes, etc., in order to work them eventually into some great picture, so I was in the habit of chronicling, in four or five words or more, whatever might strike me as picturesque in Nature. I never put these down, and many a line has gone away on the north wind, but some remain, *e.g.* in the 'Idylls of the King'!—

“ With all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies.”

Line 489. “Well and worshipfully.” Malory, XVIII. 13, says, “And his fellow [Lavaine] did right well and worshipfully,” *i.e.* nobly.

Line 502. “Diamond me no diamonds!” A form of emphatic remonstrance. Compare Richard II., II. 3. 87: “Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncles.” Similar expressions are found also in Dryden’s “Wild Gallant,” and Scott’s “Ivanhoe.”

Lines 506–516. Compare Malory, XVIII. 12: “O gentle Knight Sir Lavaine, help me that this truncheon were out of my side, for it sticketh so sore that it nigh slayeth me. O mine own lord, said Sir Lavaine, I would fain do that might please you, but I dread me sore, and I draw out the truncheon, that ye shall be in peril of death. I charge you, said Sir Launcelot, as ye love me draw it out. And therewithal he descended from his horse, and right so did Sir Lavaine, and forthwith Sir Lavaine drew the truncheon out of his side. And he gave a great shriek, and a marvellous grisly groan, and his blood brast out nigh a pint at once, that at last he sank down, and so swooned pale and deadly.”

Line 545. “Bring us,” *i.e.* bring us news.

Line 548. “To which it made,” etc. Littledale calls attention to a similar picture to that of the diamond in the heart of the carven flower in “Maud,” I. XIV. 2:—

“Maud’s own little oak-room
(Which Maud, like a precious stone
Set in the heart of the carven gloom,
Lights with herself,” . . .).

Line 551. The character of Gawain, “with a touch of traitor,” as developed in the Idylls, is a creation of Tennyson. In the Romances Gawain is a brave and honorable knight, the friend and counsellor of Arthur.

Line 555. "And Gareth, a good knight." The original edition read, — "And Lamorak, a good knight."

Line 556. "Sir Modred's." In some of the Romances, Modred was the reputed son of the king, and in others, the nephew. He was afterwards a traitor, and was slain by the king. See "The Passing of Arthur."

Line 583. "Our true Arthur." The queen, not Lancelot, had said this. * See line 151 above.

Line 592. "So fine a fear." There is a touch of sarcasm in this expression.

Lines 602-610. A striking portrayal of human passion. These lines together with lines 1190-1229 present the strongest exhibition of passion that the poem affords.

Line 620. "It is a line of which Shakespeare might be proud." Brooke.

Line 658. "And when the shield was brought." Compare Malory, XVIII. 14.

Line 661. "That true man." Ironical, but Elaine understands neither his mockery nor his courtly badinage.

Line 672. For the sound-play on the verb "know" compare line 163 above.

Line 681. "With one I may not name," *i.e.* the queen.

Line 686. "Let me leave." The leaving of the diamond with Elaine, and the king's subsequent wrath with Gawain, are incidents introduced into the story by Tennyson. They are not mentioned by Malory.

Line 701. A good illustration of the rapid change of scene so common in the poem.

Line 707. "Deeming our courtesy," etc. In direct contrast to Arthur's dictum, "Obedience is the courtesy due to kings." Thus Gawain angers the king.

Line 715. "For twenty strokes of the blood," *i.e.* for twenty beats of the heart, for fifteen seconds or so.

Line 728. "Marr'd her friend's aim," etc. Thwarted the old gossip's purpose by receiving the intelligence calmly.

Line 735. "Felt the knot," etc. An accurate picture of strong jealousy, sternly repressed.

Lines 769-770. "And sure . . . save a queen's." He expresses audibly what he already fears, that Elaine is attracted by the great Sir Lancelot.

Line 778. A presage of her actual doom.

Line 795. "The strange-statued gate," etc. For a description of the gate see "Gareth and Lynette," lines 209-226.

Line 798. "His own far blood," *i.e.* his distant relatives.

Line 810. "Then she saw him lying," etc. Compare Malory, XVIII. 15: "And when she saw him lie so sick and pale in his bed, she might not speak, but suddenly she fell to the earth down suddenly in a swoon, and there she lay a great while."

Line 829. "What might she mean by that?" It begins to dawn on Lancelot that Elaine loves him.

Line 844. "In either twilight," *i.e.* morning and evening.

Line 851. "Forbore him." Was patient with him.

Line 854. "And never woman," etc. "So this maiden Elaine never went from Sir Lancelot, but watched him day and night, and did such attendance to him that the French book saith there was never woman did more kindlier for man than she." — Malory, XVIII. 15.

Lines 871-872. "His honor rooted in dishonor," etc. Lines often quoted as an example of Tennyson's strength and concentration of style, and mentioned by Bain as an example of Tennyson's love of epigram.

Line 880. "That ghostly grace." The visionary image of the queen.

Line 905. "The victim's flowers before he fall." The allusion is to the flowers which decorate an animal led to sacrifice.

Line 924. "Then suddenly and passionately she spoke." Compare Malory, XVIII. 19.

Stopford Brooke remarks here: "Nor do I know anything in his [Tennyson's] work more tender than her [Elaine's] character, her love, and her fate." In line 624 *et seq.* he says: "She rises to the very verge of innocent maidenliness in passionate love, but she does not go over the verge. And to be on the verge, and not to pass beyond it, is the very peak of innocent girlhood when seized by overmastering love. It was as difficult to represent Elaine as to represent Juliet; and Tennyson has succeeded well where Shakespeare has succeeded beautifully. It is great praise, but it is well deserved."

J. Churton Collins says: "In the poem, Elaine, though fervidly emphatic, is less indelicately importunate (than in the Romance). The struggle between the uncontrollable passion which has made her speak and the maiden modesty which would seal her lips, of which there are no traces in the Romance, is depicted with great skill by the poet."

Lines 936-937. "With such a stupid heart," etc. "The world, in its stupidity, puts an evil interpretation on what it sees and hears."

Line 953. Lancelot's domain was in Brittany.

Lines 959-962. In these lines Tennyson has exquisitely expanded the simple words of Malory, "She fell down in a swoon."

Line 964. "A flash." Referring to Lancelot's phrase, "love's first flash of youth," in line 944.

Lines 976-978. A sample of Tennyson's keen and subtle insight into human nature.

Lines 992-996. "These are lovely lines, which tell of her lonely watch at night" — Brooke.

Line 997. "And in those days she made a little song." "And the song, how simply wrought it is, and yet how subtly — with the subtlety of long passion's interwoven thought! It is almost like a piece out of the 'Sonnets' of Shakespeare, full of his to-and-fro play with words that are thoughts; with the same kind of all-pervading emotion in the lines; the same truth in the situation and the character of the singer; and with Tennyson's deep-seated waters of love — which too rarely come to the surface — welling upwards in it." — Stopford Brooke.

Line 1015. "Hark the Phantom of the house." An allusion to an old superstition that many families were forewarned of approaching death or misfortune by the appearance of a ghostly figure, who went shrieking about the house, and was known as the "Banshee."

Line 1048. "Muse at me," *i.e.* think upon me.

Lines 1080-1081. "Never yet," etc. Ludicrously out of place in the mouth of a child like Elaine.

Line 1092. "The ghostly man." The priest.

Line 1094. In the following scene Tennyson follows Malory very closely. Compare Malory, XVIII. 19. "Now speak we of the fair maiden of Astolat, that made much sorrow night and day, that she never slept, eat, nor drank; . . . So when she had endured a ten days, . . . then she shrived her clean, and received her Creator. . . . And then she called her father Sir Bernard, and her brother Sir Tirre, and heartily she prayed her father that her brother might write a letter like as she did indite it; and so her father granted her. And when the letter was written word by word like as she devised, then she prayed her father that she might be watched until she were dead, — and while my body is hot, let this letter be put in my right hand, . . . and let me be put in a fair bed, and all my richest clothes be laid with me in a chariot unto the next place where Thames is, and there let me be put within a barget, and but one man with me, such as ye trust to steer me thither, and that my barget be

covered with black samite, over and over. . . . So her father granted it her faithfully, all things should be done like as she had devised. Then her father and brother made great dole, for, when this was done, anon she died. And so when she was dead, the corpse, and the bed, all was led the next day unto Thames, and there a man, and the corpse, and all, were put into Thames, and so the man steered the barget unto Westminster, and there he rowed a great while to and fro or any espied it."

Line 1129. "So that day there was dole in Astolat." Note the poet's brief way of expressing the family grief. "No elaborate description could portray their grief so strikingly as these few monosyllables," — Rowe.

Line 1130. "But when the next sun," etc. Compare line 411 above.

Line 1141. "Set in her hand a lily." The introduction of the lily is a fancy of Tennyson. Of what is it symbolic? Does the idea of the lily strike the reader as a bit of affectation on the part of the poet, or as artistic? See note on line 1148.

Line 1148. "In her right hand the lily." Mr. Churton Collins thinks that Tennyson had in mind Byron's description of Medora (*Corsair*, III. 190) :—

" In life itself she was so still and fair
That death with gentle aspect wither'd there ;
And the cold flowers her colder hands contain'd,
In that last gasp as tenderly were strain'd,
As if she scarcely felt, but feigned a sleep,
And made it almost mockery yet to weep,
 . . . her lips
 . . . seem as they forbore to smile ;
But the white shroud and each extended tress
Long-fair," etc.

The opinion of Mr. Collins seems hardly warranted, but it is interesting to compare the portrayal of similar scenes by Byron and Tennyson. Both are beautiful ; but nothing can surpass the tenderness and pathos with which Tennyson has expressed himself.

Line 1158. "Hard-won and hardly won." See line 163, note.

Line 1160. "Nine-years-fought-for." An illustration of Tennyson's fondness for coining compounds for the occasion. Such compounds abound in Tennyson's poems, and constitute a considerable

feature in his style, even at times destroying the smoothness and rhythm of the verse.

Line 1170. Note that the oriel scene which follows may be considered *the* characteristic scene of the whole poem. It embodies the central idea and meaning of the Idyll with reference to the general story, and its place therein. It is likewise an instance of artistic contrast in which the Idylls abound. "The picture presents contrasted aspects, active and passive, according as we look at the oriel above, or the barge with its sad burden below. Above we see the fallen Guinevere, the sinful agent, in the vehement action and life of unhallowed passion;—below spotless Elaine, the sinless sufferer, in the calm repose and death of sacred affection."—Elsdale.

Line 1170. "Summer side." Southern side.

Line 1178. "Tawnier than her cygnets." The down of a cygnet, or young swan, is of dusky shade. The comparison shows the rare whiteness of the queen's neck.

Lines 1190–1229. See lines 602–609 above. Guinevere's emotion, as it is gradually developed in these lines, presents one of the two exhibitions in the poem of human passion at its highest.

Line 1223. This sudden outburst of wrath is in fine contrast to the cool self-possession hitherto marked by the queen's words. The *woman's* heart speaks here. Note the dramatic effect.

Line 1256. "The meek Sir Percivale." Compare "The Holy Grail," line 3. "Whom Arthur and his knighthood called The Pure." In "Merlin and Vivien" he is described as "The saintly youth, the spotless lamb of Christ."

Line 1257. "And pure Sir Galahad." Galahad, "the maiden knight," was considered the type of saint-like purity. He is always clad in white armor. He was the only knight who achieved the quest of the Holy Grail.

Lines 1264–1274. "Most noble lord," etc. Compare Malory, XVIII. 20: "And this was the intent of the letter:—Most noble knight, Sir Launcelot, now hath death made us two at debate for your love; I was your lover, that men called the fair maiden of Astolat; therefore unto all ladies I make my moan; yet pray for my soul, and bury me at the least, and offer ye my mass-penny. This is my last request. And a clean maiden I died, I take God to witness. Pray for my soul, Sir Launcelot, as thou art peerless.—This was all the substance of the letter." Note that the letter in the poem is more tender and pathetic than that of Malory.

Line 1316. "To thy worship." To thy honor. Tennyson uses Malory's exact words; likewise *worshipfully*, line 1318.

Line 1319. "That shrine." Westminster Abbey, or the ancient church on the same site. Compare Malory, XVIII. 20: "And so when she was dead, the corpse and the bed, all was led the next day unto Thames, and there a man, and the corpse, and all were put into Thames, and so the man steered the barget unto Westminster."

Line 1327. "Half-forgotten kings." Is there an anachronism here?

Line 1354. "Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes," *i.e.* seeing the look of sad loneliness, etc. The 1859 edition has, "For the wild people say wild things of thee," instead of this line.

Line 1368. "Him," *i.e.* love.

Lines 1369-1370. Tennyson held an exalted idea of love. His conception is always animated with a spirit of reverence. This conception of the passion of Love is nowhere better expressed than in these two epigrammatic lines.

Line 1371. "After heaven." Next to our hopes of heaven.

Line 1376. The ensuing soliloquy of Lancelot is a genuine touch of Tennyson's poetic feeling. It is one of the finest passages in the poem.

Line 1390. "Waxes . . . wanes." Note the contrast and sound-play of these two words.

Line 1393. The 1859 edition reads:—

"Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake,
Stole from his mother, so the story runs—
She chanted snatches of mysterious song."

Malory makes no mention of this incident.

"The Lady of the Lake." In the Romances there are widely different accounts of the Lady of the Lake. Malory gives four different views of her. One Lady of the Lake sends Arthur the sword Excalibur, and asks for Balin's head in return; another Lady of the Lake confines Merlin in a stone prison; a third, "one of the damosels of the lake, called Nymue," shuts Merlin "in a roche," and busies herself about Arthur's safety; a fourth helps Lancelot. In the Idylls Tennyson gives the Lady of the Lake a spiritual and mysterious character.

Line 1415. "That forgotten mere." Lancelot has implied in line 1410 that the place of the mysterious lake from which he gets his name is no longer known.

Line 1418. "Not knowing he should die a holy man." Malory, XVI. 9, 10, tells how at last Guinevere became a nun, and how Lancelot devoted himself to a life of penance and prayer in a hermitage, where he died from grief at hearing of the death of Guinevere.

NOTES.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

Lines 1-5. These introductory lines serve as a sort of second and explanatory title.

Line 1. "The bold Sir Bedivere," a stereotyped epithet often applied to Sir Bedivere after the model of Homer. Compare Homer's "swift-footed Achilles." It is one of the means adopted by the poet to give the poem an archaic flavor.

Line 2. Compare "The Coming of Arthur," lines 175-176 :—

"Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights,
Knighted by Arthur at his crowning —"

Compare also "Malory," XXI. 4. At the end of the last great battle, Bedivere is left the sole survivor of all Arthur's knights.

Lines 9-28. These lines are not in the 1869 edition. They are an afterthought of the poet, suggested, perhaps, by the doubt and uncertainty of the times. They are the outburst of a noble soul harassed with doubt and fear for the outcome of things.

"I remember," says Stopford Brooke, "the years in which these lines were written, and the temper of society, and they describe that temper with a great imagination. It was a time when every belief was challenged, when society had almost ceased to hope or believe in the future even of man on the earth, and when political and social ideas which prophesied the advent of a more unselfish world were laughed at as unpractical."

Do these lines contribute to the effect of the poem? Do they aid our conception of the allegory? Is their simplicity of diction significant?

Lines 25-26. ". . . and all my realm reels back into the beast." Compare "The Coming of Arthur," lines 10-12 :

“And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.”

Compare also “The Last Tournament,” lines 122–125:—

“Or whence the fear lest this my realm, uprear’d,
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,
From flat confusion and brute violences,
Reel back into the beast, and be no more?”

Line 28. “I pass but shall not die.” Even in his despair Arthur has faith in the prophecy of Merlin. See “The Coming of Arthur,” lines 418–421:—

“And Merlin in our time
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
Tho’ men may wound him, that he will not die,
But pass again to come.”

Lines 29–49. These lines illustrate the poet’s fondness for prophetic dreams and forecasts of the future. The appearance of such vision, significant of coming evil before a fatal fight, is common in old chronicles. The pupil will recall the appearance of Cæsar’s ghost to Brutus before the battle of Philippi.

Ellsdale remarks that there is a sort of retributive justice in making it the ghost of Gawain that has to proclaim the hollowness of that delight which the pleasure-seeking Gawain had all his life followed.

Line 33. “Hollow, hollow all delight!” For the character of Gawain see “Lancelot and Elaine,” lines 551–557, and the note on the same.

Line 36. “And I am blown along a wandering wind.” Tennyson was an admirer of Dante, and this line was probably suggested by “The Inferno,” Canto V., where the punishment of “carnal sinners” is thus described:—

“The stormy blast of hell
With restless fury drives the spirits on
Whirled round and dash’d amain with sore annoy,
When they arrive before the ruinous sweep,
Their shrieks are heard, their lamentations, moans,
And blasphemies ’gainst the good Power in heaven.”

Lines 38–40. “Like wild birds . . . and wail their way,” etc. Again compare “The Inferno,” Canto V.:—

“ As cranes,
 Chanting their dolorous notes, traverse the sky,
 Stretched out in long array, so I beheld
 Spirits: who came loud wailing, hurried on
 By their dire doom.”

Line 41. “Shrill’d.” Note the effect of the trochees in the first foot, together with the abrupt break after the first half foot. Is this characteristic of Tennyson?

Line 43. “As of some lonely city,” etc. Contrast this simile with that in lines 457-461 below, which describe the jubilant cries welcoming Arthur to the isle of rest.

Line 48. “All that haunts the waste and wild.” Compare “Guinevere,” lines 127-129:—

“Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,
 And heard the spirits of the waste and weald
 Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan.”

All creation seems to Arthur to mourn his failure.

Lines 50-64. Contrast the practical, matter-of-fact nature of Sir Bedivere with the highly wrought, imaginative nature of King Arthur. Bedivere does not believe in ghosts or dreams. They are of no significance. Let Gawain go. There is work to be done. Modred and his knights are at hand.

“Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.”

Line 59. “Modred.” Modred is *the villain* of the Idylls. His character, as developed throughout the poem, is contemptible, treacherous, and malicious. He is frequently mentioned, but never appears in an honorable light. Compare “Guinevere,” lines 569-572:—

“ . . . The man they call
 My sister’s son — no kin of mine, who leagues
 With Lords of the White Horse, heathen and knights,
 Traitors . . . ”

Line 66. “In the west.” According to the romances, when Arthur, hearing of Modred’s treachery, returned from his war with Lancelot, Modred retreated toward the west, where he made his last stand.

Lines 67-70. For a list of these wars see “Lancelot and Elaine,” lines 283-316. See also the note on the same.

Line 77. "One lying in the dust at Almesbury." Guinevere had taken refuge in the nunnery at Almesbury after her love for Lancelot was disclosed. Arthur, while on his way to meet Modred, came hither for a farewell interview. At his approach the queen was conscience-stricken, and —

" Prone from off her seat she fell
And grovelled with her face against the floor."

Line 78. Meaning of this line ?

Line 81. "Lyonnesse." See "Lancelot and Elaine," line 35, note.

Malory places the scene of the battle near Salisbury. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in Cornwall, on the river Cambula. Tennyson, in harmony with the mystic realm of Arthur in the Idylls, chooses the mythical land of Lyonnesse for the scene of the battle.

Lines 82-87. These lines form a most fitting introduction to the battle scene which follows. Note their pictorial power. They are an excellent example of Tennyson's power in this direction.

Line 87. "The phantom circle of a moaning sea." A striking figure suggesting the vague, dimly defined outlines of a distant sea-horizon.

Lines 90-91. "When the great light of heaven," etc., *i.e.* December 21, or, approximately, the end of the year. It will be remembered that Tennyson intended the story of the Idylls should run through one complete year. Accordingly, the final catastrophe and death of Arthur occur at the close of the year.

Lines 90-135. The vividness and realism of this fine description of the battle can hardly be surpassed, yet it is evolved for the most part from Malory's simple account: "And never was there seen a dolefuller battle in no Christian land. For there was but rushing and riding, foining and striking, and many a grim word was there spoken either to other, and many a deadly stroke."

While the poet has not obtruded any allegorical significance in his description of the battle, we can hardly fail to recognize in veiled language a description of the whole battle of humanity for life and faith and hope in the midst of its chill misery.

Tennyson would often quote these lines as some of his best work, and would allow that it was a "presentment of human death" as well as the overthrow of the "old order."

Line 95. "A death-white mist," etc. Contrast this dismal picture with the brilliant picture of Arthur's first battle in "The Coming of Arthur," lines 95-99:—

“When Arthur reached a field-of-battle bright
 With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world
 Was all so clear about him, that he saw
 The smallest rock far on the faintest hill
 And even in high day the morning star.”

Lines 108–117. Note the effect of the rhythm and the words in echoing the sense.

Lines 120–121. Note the effect of the dominant letter *s* in appropriately expressing the flash of the waves.

Lines 129–135. This last picture of the gradual inroad of the sea is finely conceived and powerfully expressed.

Lines 139–141. Mark the allegorical significance here. The “great voice that shakes the world” seems hardly warranted from the gentle and gradual rising of the tide on a flat, sandy shore. It is rather the voice of Time which gradually pulls down and destroys all things. The sea beating on the coast and wearing away the shore is an apt symbol of the effects of Time.

Lines 147–153. The prosaic Sir Bedivere, little inclined to moralize, again takes the practical view of the situation. His loyalty is not in doubt, his practical nature insists on prompt action in the work to be done.

Line 162. “King am I,” etc. Noble words and a fitting climax. Aroused by the words of Sir Bedivere, Arthur again rises to the full dignity of his kingship, and the grand purpose for which he has come.

Line 168. “Excalibur.” For a description of this famous weapon see “The Coming of Arthur,” lines 294–308.

Line 170. At this point the poem lapses into the original fragment, “Morte d’Arthur,” published in 1842. The poet is not over particular to join the old and new without a perceptible break. The old introduction, “So all day long,” etc., is retained as a sort of recapitulation of what has gone before, that our attention may be concentrated on the scene that follows.

The remainder of the narrative, although written so many years before the rest of the Idylls, is in the best Tennysonian vein, and serves to rank “The Passing of Arthur” as one of the finest of the Idylls.

Lines 176–180. Note the conciseness yet vividness with which this picture is drawn.

Line 178. “Strait.” Note the use of the word here.

Line 180. "A great water." This phrase has often been criticised as affected phraseology. What would be the difference in effect if the poet had used the more definite word "lake" for the vague term "water"?

Line 191. "Tho' Merlin sware," etc. Compare "The Coming of Arthur," lines 150 *et seq.*, also lines 418-423.

Line 199. "Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful." An exact repetition of line 284 in "The Coming of Arthur." The line is again repeated in line 312 below.

Line 205. "And fling him far." The personal pronoun "him" is used interchangeably with "it" in referring to Excalibur. The former has a suggestion of affection to Arthur. He regards the sword as a person endowed with life and power.

Lines 207-432. In the following pathetic episode Tennyson follows Malory closely, but here and there lights up the narrative with poetic touches of his own.

Lines 212-215. This vivid picture is expanded from Malory's simple words, "So Sir Bedivere departed."

Lines 224-226. Compare these lines with the simple prose of Malory, "The pommel and the haft were of precious stones."

Line 228. "This way and that dividing the swift mind." This line is almost an exact reproduction of Virgil's line in the "*Æneid*," IV. 285:—

"Atque animum nunc huc celerem nunc dividit illuc."

"And he divides his swift mind now this way, now that."

The line is expressive of his indecision.

Lines 230-232. Malory says, "And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree." Note Tennyson's minute study of outward nature, and reproduction of detail.

Lines 238-240.

"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag."

One of the finest examples of onomatopœic effect in the English language.

"These two phrases mark exactly the difference of sound produced by water swelling up against a permeable or impermeable barrier."

—Brimley.

Line 251. "Across the ridge." This phrase was inserted in "Morte d'Arthur," in 1853.

Lines 266-268. "What record," etc. These words show that Sir Bedivere fails to recognize the scope of Arthur's purpose and life-work.

Line 272. "Wrought by the lonely Maiden of the Lake." See "The Coming of Arthur," lines 282-293. For a further account see Malory I. 23.

Line 280. Almost a repetition of line 233. The frequent repetition of single lines is an echo of Homer.

Line 290. "Laid widow'd," helplessly bereft. Tennyson uses the metaphorical word widow'd several times in his poetry. "My widow'd race" and "my heart, though widow'd," in "In Memoriam," likewise "widow'd channel" in "Queen Mary."

Line 300. "I will arise and slay thee with my hands." Forman remarks that this line is "one of the master touches of a masterly poem." Such a passionate outburst is quite unusual to the character of Arthur as depicted by Tennyson. It is a touch of humanity.

Lines 301-310. "In this description of Sir Bedivere's last and successful attempt to throw the sword into the lake every word tells of rapid, agitated, determined action, refusing to dally with temptation that had twice overcome him." — Brimley.

Of lines 307-310 the same author remarks: "An inferior artist would have shouted through a page, and emptied a whole pallet of color, without any result but interrupting his narrative, where Tennyson in three lines strikingly illustrates the fact he has to tell, — associates it with one of nature's grandest phenomena, and give a complete picture of this phenomenon."

Line 307. "A streamer of the northern morn," *i.e.* the Aurora Borealis, or northern light.

Line 308. "Moving isles of winter," floating icebergs.

Lines 335-336. "Half rose, slowly, with pain," etc. Note the effect of the metre in depicting the effort of the wounded king to rise.

Lines 350-351. Note the realism in these lines. Compare also "Guinevere," lines 597-599 : —

"The money vapor rolling round the King,
Who seemed the phantom of a giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray."

Lines 354-360. Another excellent example of onomatopœa.

"As clear as a piece of ringing, smiting, clashing sound as any to be found in Tennyson. . . . We hear all the changes on the vowel *a* — every sound of it used to give the impression — and then, in a

moment, the verse runs into breadth, smoothness, and vastness : for Sir Bedivere comes to the shore, and sees the great water :—

“ ‘ And on a sudden, lo, the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon,’

in which the vowel *o* in its changes is used as the vowel *a* has been used above.”—Brooke.

Line 356. “ ‘ The bare black cliff clang’d round him,’ etc. Observe the effect of alliteration and the successive, accented monosyllables.

Line 361. Malory’s account is as follows: “ ‘ And when they were at the water-side, even fast by the bank hove a little barge with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and they all had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur. ‘ Now put me into the barge,’ said the king ; and so they did softly, and there received him three queens with great mourning, and so they set him down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head ; and then that queen said, ‘ Ah ! dear brother, why have ye tarried so long ? ’ ”

“ ‘ He would be a bold critic who should pronounce that Tennyson has improved this. He would be a still bolder critic who should wish to see a touch or letter of Tennyson’s version altered. The truth is that in this case there is no parallel between the poet and the romancist. Each had to tell a story in itself so wondrously beautiful, so touching, so suggestive, so picturesque, that it mattered little how it was narrated, provided only it was narrated with fidelity. . . . Tennyson’s elaborate beauties command our admiration. Malory’s simple words go straight to the heart. In the one case we dwell upon the eloquence of the speaker ; in the other we are lost in the story that he tells.” —J. Churton Collins.

Line 366. “ ‘ Three queens.” See “ ‘ The Coming of Arthur,” lines 275–278 :—

“ ‘ Three fair queens,
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.”

These three queens in the allegory probably typify the three Christian virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity.

Line 367. “ ‘ A cry that shiver’d to the tingling stars.” The cry is from “ ‘ a company of spirits amid mountains whose natural power of echo is heightened by the silence of the night, the clearness of the

winter air, and the hardening effects of a frosty, wintry night. Such a cry, at such a time, and in such a place, would thrill from rock to rock, from summit to summit, till it seemed to pierce the sky in a hustling storm of multitudinous arrow sounds." — Brimley.

Lines 369-371. "Like a wind . . . of the world." Observe how vividly the simile expresses the idea of utter loneliness and mournfulness.

Line 381. "Like the wither'd moon," *i.e.* like the moon fading before the rising sun.

Line 383. "Dash'd with drops of onset," *i.e.* dashed with drops of blood from the assault.

For "onset" see glossary.

Lines 389-393. This beautiful passage, contrasting Arthur in his hour of darkness with Arthur in his hour of glory, and making his prowess in the lists typical of the latter, is hardly in keeping with Lancelot's description of Arthur in "Lancelot and Elaine," lines 283-316. In the latter passage it is as a warrior, and not as a tilter, that Arthur is pictured in his greatness.

Line 396. "My forehead and my eyes." The use of specific organs for the general term, face, is Homeric.

Line 401. "The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh." See Matthew ii. 11. Arthur is compared to the star of the East which appeared to the wise men, and led them to Bethlehem.

Line 403. "An image of the mighty world." The old belief was that the world was round and flat. Malory has the following concerning the Round Table: "Also Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right. For all the world, Christian and heathen, repair unto the Round Table, and when they are chosen to be of the fellowship of the Round Table, they think them more blessed and more in worship than if they had gotten half the world."

Lines 405-406. The allegory is apparent here. Humanity sees its ideals shattered, and in the new doctrines is forced to look for others.

Lines 408-423. Tennyson was very fond of reading these lines aloud. In them he strikes his fundamental chord. "He is filled with horror for many of the so-called movements of advance. He is suspicious of the new intellectual, social, and political efforts that characterized his age. Men's souls were shaken by the warring of the high and holy." — Macallum.

Line 408 is a repetition of line 508 in "The Coming of Arthur."

Line 416. "Pray for my soul." Note the effect of the trochee in the first foot in expressing "entreaty."

Line 423. "Bound by golden chains," etc. The old notion that the earth is attached to heaven by a golden chain is frequently alluded to in English literature. Jeremy Taylor writes, "Faith is the golden chain to link the penitent sinner to God." Archbishop Hare says, "This is the golden chain of love, whereby the whole creation is bound to the throne of the Creator." Compare also Milton, "Paradise Lost, II. 1051 :—

"Hanging in a golden chain
This pendant world."

Many other allusions might be cited.

Line 427. "To the island-valley of Avilion." Avilion, or Avalon, is supposed to have been the name of a valley in the neighborhood of Glastonbury, where Joseph of Arimathea is said to have first landed with the Holy Grail. It is called an island, because nearly surrounded by the winding of a river. Some romances make it an ocean island, the abode of Arthur. In the Celtic myths it is an island where the wounded are healed and the old made young. In Tennyson it is a mystical place like the other localities in the Idylls.

Line 428. This description of Avilion was suggested, perhaps, by Homer's account of Elysium in the "Odyssey," IV. 566, and VI. 42.

Line 435. "That, fluting a wild carol ere her death." There was a long-standing tradition that the swan just previous to death sings a sweet song. The tradition has no foundation of fact. Compare Tennyson's "The Dying Swan," Stanza III.

Line 437. "With swarthy webs," *i.e.* with her swarthy, webbed feet.

Line 440. The original fragment ends here. The twenty-nine lines added later continue the mystical story. "The passing soul, having fought a good fight, having finished its course, having kept the faith, is received beyond the limit of the world." — Littledale.

Line 445. "From the great deep," etc. This "weird rhyme" is a repetition of Merlin's "riddling triplets" in line 410 of "The Coming of Arthur." According to an ancient belief, "Animated beings have three states of Existence, that of Inchoation in the Great Deep, or lowest point of Existence; that of Liberty in the State of Humanity; and that of Love, which is happiness in Heaven." Read Tennyson's "De Profundis: The Two Greetings," *i.e.* birth and death.

“Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,

* * * * *

To that last deep where we and thou are still.”

Line 460. Contrast these sounds of welcome with the dim cries of despair in lines 41-45, and of lamentation in lines 368-369 above.

Line 469. The cycle of the mystic year is now complete from Arthur's birth. It is the last night of the old year as Arthur passes away, and the sun rises bringing in a new year. The poem closes with a line of hope worthy of the noble character that Tennyson has depicted.

GLOSSARY.

CONTAINING OBSOLETE WORDS, AND WORDS USED IN
AN UNUSUAL SENSE IN THE FOREGOING IDYLLS.

ABBREVIATIONS :

L. E. Lancelot and Elaine.

P. A. Passing of Arthur.

O. F. Old French.

O. E. Old English.

M. E. Middle English.

M. L. Middle Latin.

A. S. Anglo-Saxon.

G. German.

Affiance. L. E. 1346. Trust, confidence. Used in this sense by Shakespeare. Its more common meaning is betrothal or marriage.

M. E. *affiance*, *afiance*. O. F. *afiance*, from *affier*, to trust in.

Allowed of. L. E. 110. Approved by. This *allow* is from the French *allouer*, to approve ; from the Latin *ad*, to, and *laudare*, to praise.

It must not be confused with "allow" in the sense of "permit."

See L. E. 152 and 201.

Anon. L. E. 342. Soon afterward ; literally, in one instant. M. E. *anon* ; originally a prepositional phrase, *on ān*, i.e. in one.

Armlet. L. E. 1219. A little arm, hence, an ornament for the arm ; a metal band or ring worn on the upper arm. From *arm* and the diminutive suffix *let*.

Barren-beaten. L. E. 160. Made barren by being trodden. One of the many compounds formed and used by Tennyson as epithets.

Battle-writhen. L. E. 807. Twisted by wielding sword and spear in battle. Another Tennyson compound. *Writhen* is an obsolete participle from *writhe*. M. E. *writhen*, to twist.

Belike. L. E. 214. Probably in early modern English also written *belyke* or *bylyke* ; apparently of dialect origin, *be*, *by*, prep., and *like*, likely, i.e. by what is likely.

Black-stoled. P. A. 365. Black-robed. The *stole* was a long, loose robe. M. E. *stole*. Latin *stola*, a robe.

- Blank.** L. E. 193. Bare, *i.e.* without coat of arms or other device. M. E. *blank*, fem. *blanche*. French *blanc*, fem. *blanche*, white.
- Blare.** L. E. 938. To trumpet forth. Compare *blaze*, to proclaim, both words being from the same root as *blow*.
- Blazoned.** L. E. 9. A heraldic term applied to the devices portrayed on the shield or armor. French *blasonner*.
- Braided.** L. E. 8. Embroidered. But *braid* and *broider* are from different roots, and have different meanings. *Braid* is from a Teutonic base, *bragd*, meaning to swing, hence to entwine, weave. A. S. *bregdan*. M. E. *braiden*. *Broider* is from the French *broder*, or *border*, and meant originally "to work on the edge," hence, to ornament with needlework.
- Brake.** L. E. 1130. An obsolete form of *broke*.
- Burthen.** L. E. 898. A refrain of a song repeated after each stanza. *Burthen* is more properly spelt *burden*, from the French *bourdon*, the drone of a humming bee. M. E. *burdown*. This word must not be confused with *burthen*, a load.
- Casque.** P. A. 377. A helmet. French *casque*, a helmet.
- Chancel.** P. A. 177. The enclosed space in a church surrounding the altar, formerly separated from the rest of the church by a screen or lattice-work, hence, the name from the Latin *cancelli*, lattice-work. M. E. *chauncel*. O. F. *chancel*.
- Clomb.** P. A. 446. An obsolete form of *climbed*.
- Couched.** L. E. 477; *i.e.* placed the spear under the right armpit in position for attack, with the butt end in the *rest* or socket behind the saddle. O. F. *coucher*, Latin *collocare*, to place together.
- Crescent.** L. E. 446, 1389. Growing. From the Latin *crescen(t)s*, to grow or increase. French *croissant*. M. E. *cressent*.
- Cuirass.** L. E. 293. Breastplate; from French *cuir*; Latin *corium*, leather, armor for the breast having been originally made of leather.
- Cuisses.** P. A. 383. Armor for the thighs. Latin *coxa*, thigh. French *cuisse*: also written *cuishes*.
- Curvet.** L. E. 787. To prance with all four feet off the ground at the same time. French *courbetter*.
- Dais-throne.** P. A. 386. A throne elevated on the dais or platform. Dais from M. L. *discus*, a table, in early Latin a plate. O. F. *dais*, a high table. M. E. *deis*.
- Devices.** L. E. 9. Armorial bearings. Early mod. E. *devise*.

M. E. *devise*, *devyse*, *devys*. O. F. *devise*, a division, difference, plan, contrivance. Latin *divisus*. The word *device* literally means a division ; hence a disposition or desire ; hence, a contrivance, a design.

Devoir. L. E. 118. Literally "duty" ; hence, often used of the devotion of a knight for his lady. French *devoir*, to owe. Latin *devere*.

Dint. L. E. 19. Literally a "blow" ; hence, as here, an indentation made by a blow. M. E. *dint* or *dynt*, also *dent*, whence the other mod. E. form *dent*, a blow. *Dint* also has the sense of force or power. Compare *by dint of*.

Dipt. L. E. 394. P. A. 311. Went down. Another form of *dipped*, the past tense of *dip*. M. E. *dippen*.

Dole. L. E. 1129. Grief. M. E. *dol*. O. F. *dol*. Latin *dolor*.

Downs. L. E. 162. A rolling country, somewhat elevated, not covered by forests. The term is particularly applied to certain districts in southern and southeastern England. M. E. *down* or *dun*. A. S. *dun*, a hill.

Enow. L. E. 683. Enough ; originally a plural form of the indefinite pronoun, "enough" ; but Tennyson uses the word without distinction of number for "enough," pronoun and adverb.

Fain. L. E. 767. Glad, from an old Teutonic base, *fag*, to fit, or to suit. The word originally meant "fixed" ; hence, "suited," "satisfied," "content." Early mod. E. *fayne*. M. E. *fain*, or *fayn*. A. S. *fagan*. It is now used to imply the acceptance of an alternative to something better.

Fantastical. L. E. 591. Whimsical, full of romantic fancies. *Fantastic* + *al*. O. F. *fantastique*. Mod. F. *fantastique*.

Fantasy. L. E. 11. A fanciful design ; an older form of *fancy*, a whim ; hence, a product of fancy.

Fealty. P. A. 243. A doublet of "*fidelity*." O. F. *fealte*. Latin *fidelitas*, faithfulness.

Glamour. P. A. 52. Enchantment ; hence, charm, fascination. Also *glamor*, or more correctly, *glamer* ; probably from the same root as *gleam*.

Greaves. P. A. 383. Armor for the lower part of the legs. Made of metal, and lined with some soft substance. M. E. *greves*. O. F. *greves*, shin.

- Haft.** P. A. 224. A handle, as of a sword. A. S. *haeft*, a handle. M. E. *haft*.
- Hern.** L. E. 653. A contraction of "heron," a kind of bird with long legs, neck, and bill; formerly regarded as a bird of ill omen.
- Hest.** P. A. 211. A command; from O. E. *haes*; commonly written "behest." The *t* is an added letter, and the vowel is consequently shortened.
- Holpen.** L. E. 494. Helped. Holpen is an antiquated form.
- Hove.** P. A. 361. Probably the past tense of "*heave*," but used here by Tennyson as the past tense of *hove*, to wait, or to linger; hence, of a boat, to float.
- Jacinth.** P. A. 225. The same as *hyacinth*, a precious stone of the color of the hyacinth flower, blue and purple. M. E. *jacint*. O. F. *jacinthe*, Latin *hyacinthus* (from the Greek).
- Joust.** L. E. 31 : P. A. 270. Another form of "just," a tournament; from Latin *juxta*, near; literally a "meeting together." M. E. *juste*; O. F. *joste*; Mod. F. *joute*.
- Joyance.** L. E. 1313. Enjoyment; an archaic word used by Spenser and Byron. O. F. *joyance*.
- Lap.** P. A. 239. To make a sharp sound as a dog does when licking water with his tongue. Tennyson uses the word here to distinguish between the peculiar sharp sound of the water striking against the rocks, from the soft sound of the water as it splashes among the reeds. The word is of Teutonic origin.
- Lichened.** L. E. 44. To be covered with lichens, so as to give anything the color of lichens.
- Lief.** P. A. 248. Beloved, from the same root as "love," and "belief." M. E. *leef*, A. S. *léof*. The word is archaic.
- Links.** L. E. 165. Windings, as of a river; hence, the ground lying along such windings. The word is a dialect form of *linch*.
- Lustihood.** L. E. 202. Strength and vigor; an archaic word of Teutonic origin. Compare German *lustigkeit*.
- Lustrous.** P. A. 284. Bright, luminous, chiefly used figuratively, as here. Latin *lustrum*.
- Marches.** L. E. 525. Border lands, often the scene of battles, and hence left uncultivated. M. E. *marche*. O. F. *marche*, a border.
- Marge.** P. A. 232. Same as "*margin*"; border; French *marge*.

- Mere.** L. E. 1400. P. A. 205. A lake or pool; formerly "meer."
A. S. *mere*, a lake, pool. M. E. *mere*. Latin *mare*.
- Nightmare.** P. A. 345. A fiend supposed to cause evil dreams, and to oppress people during sleep. M. E. *nightmare*. G. *nachtmahr*. *Mare* is of Teutonic origin.
- Oared.** L. E. 1147. Rowed. Shakespeare uses the word in "The Tempest," and Tennyson twice in "The Princess." The verb "oar" is from the noun "oar." A. S. *ār*. M. E. *ore*.
- Offices.** P. A. 293. Services, duty. French *office*. Latin *officium*, duty.
- Oriel.** L. E. 1170. A projecting window. M. E. *oryel*, *oriol*. O. F. *oriol*. M. L. *oriolum*. Latin *aureolum*, a gilded room; hence, a room forming a projection in the form of a bay window, and richly furnished.
- Overdo.** L. E. 467. Outdo. The usual meaning of "overdo" is "to do too much." M. E. *overdon*.
- Palled.** L. E. 1135. Shrouded; Latin *palla*, a mantle. M. E. *pal*, *palle*. O. F. *palle*.
- Pass.** L. E. 1084. To die. Frequently used in P. A., in the sense of "disappear," *i.e.* "to depart from life."
- Pre-doomed.** L. E. 724. To condemn beforehand. *pre* + *doom*.
- Pricked.** L. E. 477. Spurred; past tense of prick. M. E. *pricken*. A. S. *prician*. G. *prickeln*.
- Quit.** L. E. 939. Requite, repay; also "quite." M. E. *quiten*. French, *quitter*. Latin *quietare*, to pay.
- Ramp.** L. E. 660. Ramping; literally "climbing." A heraldic term used of animals in the position of attack. Same root as "romp." M. E. *rampen*. O. F. *ramper*, to climb.
- Rapt.** L. E. 282. Carried away. From an English verb "rap," to snatch. M. E. *rappen*. G. *raffen*. The word is of Teutonic origin, and is not to be confused with Latin *raptus*.
- Rathe.** L. E. 338. Early. From an old M. E. adjective *rath*, adverb *rathe*, from which comes our comparative "rather."
- Sallow-rifted.** L. E. 995. Broken by patches of pallid light; a Tennyson compound.

- Samite.** Used several times in both L. E. and P. A. A rich silk interwoven with gold or silver thread ; later, rich silk material of any kind. Tennyson has both white and black samite. Probably derived from the Greek *hexamiton*, six-threaded.
- Scaur.** L. E. 53. Another form of "scar," a detached rock, a cliff. In connection with "shingly," a sloping cliff covered with pebbles. Of Teutonic origin, not to be confused with "scar," meaning a "mark."
- Shingly.** L. E. 53. Pebbly, *shingle* + *y*, same root as "sing." The coarse gravel is called "shingle," from the singing or crunching noise made by walking on it. Teutonic origin. See **Scaur** above.
- Shrill.** L. E. 1019. P. A. 369. To utter a keen, high-pitched sound or cry. M. E. *shrillen*. G. *shrillen*. Of Teutonic origin.
- Shrive.** L. E. 1093. To grant absolution. From the same root as the Latin *scribere*, to write ; hence, to prescribe a penance for sin ; hence, to grant absolution. Past tense *shrove* is seen in "Shrove Tuesday." M. E. *shriven*. A. S. *scrifan*.
- Simples.** L. E. 857. Healing herbs. Each plant was supposed to possess its particular virtue, and therefore to constitute a simple remedy. The word is commonly used in the plural.
- Soilure.** L. E. 7. The act of soiling or of tarnishing. It was the custom of knights to keep their shields covered to prevent tarnishing. Shakespeare uses the word in "Troilus and Cressida," IV. I. 56 : "Not making any scruple of her *soilure*."
- Squire.** L. E. 382. A short form for "esquire," a shield bearer. From Latin *scutum*, a shield. O. F. *escuyer*. Hence, an attendant on a knight.
- Strait.** P. A. 178. A narrow tongue of land ; more usually, a narrow passage of water connecting two bodies of water. Another form of the word is "straight." M. E. *strait*. O. F. *estrait*, narrow. Latin *strictus*.
- Tale.** L. E. 91. The full number, or sum. M. E. *tale*, a number. A. S. *talū*, a number ; hence the secondary meaning, orderly arrangement of speech, a story.
- Tamper.** L. E. 128. Another form of "temper," to meddle with ; hence, to use underhand measures, to exert corrupt influence over. From Latin, *temperare*, to divide in due proportion.
- Tarn.** L. E. 36. A small mountain lake, especially one that has no outlet. Another form of the word is "tairn." M. E. *tarne*. The word seems to be of Scandinavian origin.

- Tarriance.** L. E. 567. Delay, *tarry* + *ance*. The use of the word is rare. Shakespeare uses it twice.
- Tinct.** L. E. 10. The modern form is "tint," meaning "coloring." Latin *tinctus*, dyed.
- Topaz-lights.** P. A. 225. The *topaz* is a gem of various colors, yellow, white, green, or pale blue: probably from the Greek *topazōn*, the yellow topaz; hence, "topaz-lights" means sparkles of the different topaz colors.
- Ware.** P. A. 363. Another form of "aware."
- Waterflags.** P. A. 231. Aquatic plants of the genus *Iris*.
- Whole.** L. E. 93. Heal. *Whole* and *heal* are from the same root. Compare the expression "made whole" in the New Testament. M. E. *hol*. A. S. *hāl*. G. *heil*, sound. Teutonic origin.
- Wot.** L. E. 196. Knows. *Wot* is third person singular, present indicative of "wit." An archaic verb of Teutonic origin.

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